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A Woman's No

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By

Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron

Author of

"A Man's Undoing," "Two Cousins and a Castle," Etc., Etc.

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A WOMAN'S NO.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO HOUSES.

A BIG house on the south bank and a little house upon the north bank, and between them the river dimpling and glittering in the sunshine. Not a south-country river, mind you—sluggish of current and smooth of surface, thick and muddy with the ooze of its bed, and half-choked with the juicy-stemmed water-plants amongst which it drones its lazy way; not a river like that—but a real north-country stream, clear and sparkling, brown with the peat off which it has arisen, and crisped and curdled into hundreds of little whirlpools and crests of creamy foam; tumbling its noisy way, now amongst great gray-brown boulders with a roar like distant thunder—now over sloping rapids and shining white pebbles in a thousand miniature cascades, with a fresh, brisk chatter of its own that does one positive good to listen to.

Such is the River Lennan, with the big house on one side of it and the little house on the other.

There is no bridge to connect the two, not for three miles. Some way up stream—that is to say, a mile and a half above the houses—just beyond the wide salmon-

pool that, needless to say, belongs to the big house and not to the little one, there is a ford that in summer time, when the water is low, is quite passable and safe for carriages and horses; but which in winter, and in times of flood, is neither the one nor the other. And just below the great mass of rocks, over which the water comes so noisily rushing and tumbling, there are some stepping-stones—slippery enough and far apart from each other—but over which the country people go backwards and forwards quickly and nimbly. The young people, too, from the houses on either side, have been long in the habit of braving the dangers of the uncertain and difficult foothold; but no sane person past early youth would be rash enough to risk an immersion in the waters of the Lennan by venturing his or her unaccustomed feet upon them. These soberer spirits prefer to go round by road three miles to the nearest bridge.

Miss Ida Greythorne lived in the big house, which rejoiced in the imposing title of Strathendale Castle; and Dick Forrester lived in the little house, which was commonly designated by the very unimposing one of 'The Cottage.' Now, had Dick lived at Strathendale Castle, and Ida at The Cottage, the course of true love would have run placidly smooth, all would have gone merry as a marriage bell, and this veracious history would never have been written.

Things had, however, been arranged otherwise.

Dick Forrester was the third son in a family of seven children. His father was a retired Indian colonel, who had unfortunately lost the whole of his savings in the failure of a Bombay Bank. A comparatively small

pension and his wife's settlement had been all that had been saved out of the general ruin. With this, Colonel and Mrs. Forrester began life afresh in England. They took the cottage on the banks of the Lennan because it was low-rented, and there they proceeded to bring up their sons and daughters, striving honestly to give them as good an education as they could afford, and to teach them to fight their own way in the world.

So far the worthy couple had been singularly fortunate in their children. Margaret, the eldest, had gone into a clergyman's family as governess, and had speedily married the clergyman's curate, who happened to be also his nephew, and who shortly after his marriage was presented to a living. Roland and Bertram had got upon the foundation of a military college intended for the sons of poor officers, and had by dint of hard work and industry been translated thence into the Indian army, where they were both now serving with their regiments. Dick was reckoned the clever one of the family. He had lately, with no exertion to himself and scarcely any application, come through a very difficult examination with flying colors, and he was now at home doing nothing, waiting for an appointment to the Indian Civil Service; for Colonel Forrester's interest for his sons was naturally all in India.

The news of this appointment, his father hoped for, and his mother trembled for, by every morning's post. As to the rest of the family, Hester was twenty-three, and her mother's right hand; and the three remaining boys, all much younger—aged fourteen, twelve, and ten—were doing fairly well at a small school, where

a cheap but sound education was being painfully drummed into them.

Dick Forrester had never had a whole five-pound note of his own to bless himself with in his life, but then he had no expensive habits—he neither smoked, nor shot, nor hunted—not because he had not the inclination for these things, but because he had never had the money for them, and his father had early instilled into him that rare quality of self-control, without which the cleverest and the most amiable young man is pretty certain to make shipwreck of his life.

Dick possessed this valuable quality to an eminent degree. He was philosophical, too. He knew that he was a poor man, and he did not make himself miserable by hankering after the pleasures of a rich one. He was not unduly distressed because his clothes were not made by a fashionable tailor, or because he possessed no single object in the wide world of the slightest intrinsic value, and no other jewelry save an old silver hunting-watch that had belonged to his grandfather.

Such were the worldly circumstances of the young gentleman who lived upon the north bank of the Lennan.

Let us now turn to the young lady who resided upon the south side thereof.

Ida Greythorne was an only child, and an heiress. She received habitually an allowance of two hundred a year as pocket-money, to fritter away in any manner she chose. Her dresses were more usually of silk or velvet than of cotton or serge; or if they were of cotton they were so profusely trimmed with yards and

yards of real lace as to make them quite as costly as if they had been of a richer material. She owned a riding-horse of her own, and a groom was told off to her special service. She possessed also a pair of chestnut ponies that stepped up to their noses, and a little phaeton to drive them in, that was the despair and envy of all her friends. She had as many diamonds as a dowager-duchess, and as much old lace as would half stock an old curiosity shop; and she had never in her whole life, ever since the days when she first began to toddle alone, expressed a desire to possess or to do any single thing that the desire had not been instantly gratified.

Now all this would not have signified in the very least to Dick Forrester had Miss Greythorne been gifted by nature with sandy hair and a yellow complexion—had her eyes been small and insignificant, her mouth wide and gaping, and her figure short and stumpy.

Dick very often wished that this had been the case. But, alas! for this poor young man's peace of mind, Ida Greythorne was a very different-looking young lady. She had eyes as deep and blue as ever wiled a man's heart away; a skin clear and pale, with just a rose tint upon her soft cheeks, and the bloom of a red carnation upon her full, pouting lips, and hair red-brown and wavy, with a dash of gold upon it where the sunshine caught its clustering richness. And then her figure! There was no one in all the countryside with such a lithe young figure as Ida's! no one whose step upon the moorside was so swift and active; no one who was so straight and slim, and yet with so

delicate a perfection of every feminine outline. In point of fact, Miss Greythorne was a very lovely girl; and when she was nineteen, Dick Forrester—who had played with her as a pretty child ever since she was ten years old and he was sixteen; who had often carried her on his back across the stepping-stones, who had mended her dolls and gathered nuts for her from the topmost branches; who had taught her dog to beg, and had helped her many a time to escape from her governess and her lessons—Dick Forrester suddenly forgot the old terms he had been on with his little playfellow, and fell as madly and desperately in love with her as though she had been a new and wonderful revelation to him.

It was after she came back from her first season in London that this great and wonderful change took place in his feelings to her. She came back, as was natural, a little altered. She had been courted, and flattered, and made love to, and she held her pretty head a little higher and a little more sedately in consequence. She was more womanly, and less disposed to go tearing and romping all over the place with "poor old Dick," as she still called him in her thoughts, as of old. Besides which, there had been sundry lectures from mamma.

Now, if there was a proud woman upon the face of the earth it was Ida's mother—Lady Cressida Greythorne. Lady Cressida was a younger daughter of the late Earl of Denton, and she was as proud of her aristocratic origin as though creation had been solely created for herself and her august family.

I do not mean that she was vulgar or ostentatious;

she did not talk about her relations, nor boast most about her money and her connections. She was indeed kind and courteous to all her smaller neighbors; but underlying her courtesy there was a fixed conviction in her own mind that class should not mingle with class, and that a daughter of an aristocratic house should never lower herself to an equality with those whose blood was less blue than her own, and whose ancestry was insignificant and unknown.

She had been always kind, though perhaps never actually cordial, to Colonel Forrester and his family, and as long as Ida was a child she had made no objection to the young Forresters as playfellows for her; but now that she was grown up, and had been through her first season, and had had her first insight of the world and its realities, it was time she considered to put a check upon the freedom of the intercourse.

There had been a few words of warning from the mother to her daughter on the way up to the north in the train.

"Ida, you will understand, I dare say, that it will not do for you to be romping about the country with the young Forresters now you are no longer a child," said Lady Cressida.

"There is only Hester at home, and Dick," observed Ida.

"It was Dick, as you call him, whom I specially meant," answered her mother. "Hester is a very good young woman. I wish, by the way, you would speak of her brother as Mr. Richard Forrester."

"Oh, mamma, as if I *could!*" cried Ida, and burst out laughing. "How ridiculous it would sound when

we have known each other all our lives! Why, I could never do it!"

"Very well. I dare say you would find it difficult; I will say no more about that, but I must beg that you restrict your intimacy with him. Remember that you are a young lady now, and that your rank in life is altogether different from his; and I don't think Lord Mannering will at all like it, when he comes up to stay with us, if you are always out with that young man."

"What has Lord Mannering to do with it?" said Ida, coloring a little and shifting herself uneasily in her corner of the railway carriage.

Lady Cressida smiled.

"My dear, I don't pretend to understand the ways of your admirers; but to return to Mr. Dick Forrester; it is very certain that you will do him a great injury if you give him the slightest cause to fancy that you have any preference for him above others."

Then Ida colored very much.

"Pray do not say any more about it, mamma. I hope that I have too true a sense of my own dignity to allow any man to imagine that I have a preference for him. Of course, as you say quite rightly, I am no longer a child, and I shall be certain to remember it when I am in Dick's society."

Then Miss Ida opened her novel and concealed her face behind its sheltering pages, until Lady Cressida, following the example of her spouse in the farther corner of the carriage, had sunk into a gentle doze.

So Miss Greythorne met her old playfellow with, a demure little smile and a stiff "How do you do, Dick?" that told him at once that she had crossed the

border-line where childhood and womanhood meet; and Dick, with that perversity of human nature which is the ruin of most of us in matters of the heart, instantly discovered that she was not only a woman but a goddess, and his own divinity in particular, and that he worshiped and adored her with all his strength.

All the outward expression, however, he gave to these sudden and ardent feelings was that his sunburnt face flushed a little warmer through the tan of his cheeks, and that he found no reasonable words wherewith to answer her formal greeting. He only stuffed his hands into his pockets and looked down at his boots in a shy and awkward manner.

Ida was vexed. She had seen a good many men lately—handsome, fashionable men of the world—who never looked shy or awkward, and who were never at a loss what to say. It just passed through her mind to contrast Dick with them.

"Dick is just as handsome, and oh! fifty times as clever!" she said to herself. "But how stupid a man looks when he stares at his boots and says nothing!"

And she felt so thoroughly annoyed with him that she almost turned her back upon him, and began talking to her mother about some of their London acquaintances.

Dick went away presently, humbled and abashed.

"She is altered," he said to himself sadly. "She has turned into a fine lady, and she does not care for her old friends any longer; but for all that she is the most lovely and lovable creature on the face of the earth, and if I cannot marry her in spite of all her money, I declare I will never marry any other woman in the world!"

CHAPTER II.

A SKEIN OF WOOL.

"MOTHER, do you know that Dick has been over to Strathendale every single day this week?"

The speaker was Hester Forrester, and she stood by the open window in the little drawing-room at The Cottage, and looked across over the valley to where the towers of Strathendale Castle, half buried amidst ancient and lordly trees, shone white in the morning sunshine.

"Every single morning since they have been home Dick has gone there," repeated Hester, slowly and meaningly.

She was a very tall girl, and dark, as all the Forresters were—hair so dusky as to be almost jet black, and eyes of the deepest brown, shaded by long black lashes that swept the olive tints of her brunette cheek. For those who admire dark women—and they are legion—Hester Forrester, with her gipsy-like swarthiness and her almost regal bearing, was a very beautiful woman.

For a wonder she was idle—her hands, large, and a trifle browner than would have been those of a town-bred girl, were crossed before her, empty and inactive. That was a rare thing with Hester.

Her mother, hard at work in the room behind her, was stooping over a table covered with yards of calico.

She was cutting out a set of shirts for one of the schoolboys, and the snip-snap of her big scissors was the only sound to be heard until Hester made that observation concerning Dick's visits to Strathendale.

Then Mrs. Forrester looked up with a slight flush. Dear as were all her children to her, it was Dick who came the nearest to her heart. The slightest imputation against him was enough to set her pulses beating indignantly.

"And why shouldn't Dick go to Strathendale?" she asked quite sharply. "Has he not always gone there as much as he wanted? I cannot see what there is to find fault with him in it."

"Oh! mother, you *must* see how undesirable it is now, for every reason," said her daughter, turning round to her. "If Dick and Ida were to fall in love with each other—"

"Well, and what if they did? Is not my son good enough, and clever enough, for any woman?"

"But think of the difference between them! You must know that Mr. Greythorne and Lady Cressida would never, never allow her to marry Dick; and if he goes there so often she may get fond of him. And surely, under the circumstances, it would be quite dishonorable of Dick to try and gain her affections."

"My dear, you are a young woman, and you know very little of the ways of the world. Be good enough to leave to your brother the care of his honor—he is quite equal to it; and are you not coming to cut out these gussets for me?"

Hester moved slowly to the table, took up her scissors with a sigh, and resumed her task in silence.

Mrs. Forrester looked displeased, and Hester felt that her word of warning was worse than thrown away But although, as her mother had said, she was young, and Mrs. Forrester was old, it was the young woman who knew the world the best, and whose words had been the wisest.

Meanwhile, across the valley, Dick Forrester sat at his divinity's feet and courted his fate. It was in Lady Cressida's morning-room, and she herself sat writing her letters at her davenport.

Behind her, on a low sofa, was Ida, in the airiest and daintiest of summer gossamer garments, all lace and white muslin and pale blue ribbons. She was winding some scarlet worsted; and Dick, literally at her feet, sat on a low stool by the side of her sofa, holding the skein on his big, brown, awkward hands.

How Hester would have laughed at him if she had been there!—Dick, whose "fingers were all thumbs" in household parlance at The Cottage! What a never-dying joke it would have been to them all at home had they seen him!

But there was nothing ludicrous or laughable to Dick himself in the situation. Ida had told him to make himself useful, and she had wound the bright wool with her soft, small fingers over his big hands—he would have sat there till doomsday at her bidding!

As she wound, he looked up adoringly into her face with all his love in his dark eyes; and Ida, who was a young woman of the world, and knew quite well what those looks meant, for all her self-possession and her saucy knowledge of her own power, could not manage to raise her blue eyes for more than half a second to his.

She wound her wool and looked down at the little ball in her fingers, and she smiled, and nodded, and talked to him all about nothing; whilst Dick did not smile at all and hardly took his eyes off her face, longing with all his heart that the skein might last forever.

And Lady Cressida, sitting at her davenport, heard every word that they uttered, and found nothing to censure in their conversation; but her back was turned to them, and she could not see their faces, and she had forgotten—it was so long ago since any one had made love to her—how completely the process may be gone through in the lightning glances between two pairs of eyes, with very little extraneous assistance.

There was nothing to find fault with in this kind of thing, for instance:

"I am going to drive the ponies over to Raeburn this afternoon. Do you think Hester would care to go with me if I call for her?"

"I should think so—anybody would if they had the chance."

"Well, it's very good of Hester, because she is so much older than I am. I am not twenty yet, you know—"

"Not till the twelfth of October," says Dick, quickly.

"How well you remember! Do you recollect my thirteenth birthday, when we picnicked on the big flat stone in the middle of the Lennan—the year the water was so low?"

"Of course I recollect it; and you took off your shoes and stockings to paddle, and you cut your foot with a sharp stone—your dear little foot!"

This last was added very low indeed, so that it was

inaudible even to Lady Cressida's sharp ears; and Miss Greythorne was quite silent for a minute or two, bending over a tangle in her worsted.

"I remember your birthday too, perfectly, Dick," says Ida, presently, just because it is so awkward to be stared at fixedly and to say nothing. "It is the ninth of April. Do you recollect the tortoise-shell pocket-knife I gave you one birthday—I think it must have been your sixteenth? What a silly thing to give a big boy—it was more fit for a girl's workbox."

"I have got it now," says Dick, reverentially.

"Have you! you must have taken great care of it. I was rather in hopes you might have lost it, because they say if you give a person a knife it cuts love."

Here there occurs an ominous rustling of Lady Cressida's silken skirts, and Ida adds, hurriedly,—

"Of course that's all nonsense though, because you and I are just as good friends as ever, and shall be always, I hope, sha'n't we?"

Dick sighs gloomily. To a lover who aspires to everything, the prospect of being "good friends always" is not exactly exhilarating.

"Won't you come soon and have a day on the river with me, like old times?" he pleaded presently. "Do you remember the pool where we used to paddle, and catch sticklebacks in our pocket-handkerchiefs, and hunt for filmy ferns in the crevices of the wet rocks? and the big boulder overhanging the salmon pool where we used to eat our sandwiches? Do let us take our lunch out and have a day like that again?"

"Oh, Dick!" cried Ida, laughing, "fancy a man of your age wanting to paddle and catch sticklebacks and

hunt for ferns with a girl! You had much better ask papa to let you have a day's salmon fishing in the pool."

"I had far rather potter about with you," replied Dick, earnestly. "Do come—I will bring some lunch in a basket and we can sit and talk—it's so jolly in the shade with the river swishing by. You might manage to come just *once* for old time's sake!"

"It sounds very tempting," said Ida, dubiously.

She was weighing in her mind whether sitting on a rock in the river with Dick Forrester came correctly under the category of that "romping about the country" with him which she had promised to abjure; she gave one hurried glance of apprehension at the maternal back—it was broad and tranquil, and utterly unimpassive.

"I think I will," she said, lowering her voice just a very little. "I should like it *so* much—but it can't be this week, because there are so many things mamma wants me to do—but next week if the weather is fine."

"Pray make no engagements for next week, Ida," interrupts Lady Cressida's clear, cold voice. "Remember that the Tempests arrive on Monday, and Lord Mannering comes on Tuesday—you will have quite enough to do in entertaining your guests."

The skein of wool is just finished, and Dick draws himself on his footstool just a few inches farther away from her sofa, with a distinct frown upon his brow.

"Who is Lord Mannering? One of your swell new London friends, I suppose?"

All the instinct of jealousy is awake within him at the bare mention of the name. Your true lover is always jealous—no man, and few women, ever love without it.

Ida drew her small head up proudly.

"He is certainly a new friend," she said coldly, "but I have really never considered whether he is what you call 'swell' or not."

She was her mother's child after all.

"Now I have made you angry," said poor Dick, ruefully.

"Oh, dear no, not at all," answered Ida, carelessly, getting up from the sofa and shaking out her soft white skirts, "only I never allow any friend I like to be sneered at."

"And you like this—Lord Something or other, I suppose? You call him your friend?"

"Certainly I do— I like him very much. And now, Dick, I must really leave you and mamma to entertain each other—I have never even fed my bullfinch to-day, and Clothilde must have been waiting more than an hour to try on my new dress."

"Oh, I must be going too," says Dick, grumpily, taking no notice of her outstretched hand, but turning round to look for his hat on the table behind him.

"Oh, dear me, *must* you go, Dick!" cries Lady Cressida, quite gushingly. When Ida snubs him her ladyship can well afford to be gracious. "I hoped you would have stayed to lunch—no? then I won't press you to-day. Mr. Greythorne would have been so pleased! I hope you will come over next week and have a day's fishing or shooting with the men who are coming to stay with us? We shall be so glad if you will join them. No news of your appointment yet, I suppose? I am so sorry, it must be weary work for you waiting at home doing nothing—I know a clever young man

like you must hate to be idle. Give my love to your mother. I'm *so* sorry you can't stay and lunch."

"Good-bye, Dick," Ida said softly behind him, and held out her little white flower of a hand timidly; but Dick pretended not to see it—it dropped down again by her side, as she slipped away from the room whilst her mother was still finishing her farewell remarks.

Dick felt that he was brutal to her, but he did not mind that; he was so angry with her that he was rather glad of it than otherwise. He walked away down the hill from the Castle towards the stepping-stones, slashing savagely at the trees and the grass with his stick as he walked.

"What is the use of my shaking hands with her and pretending to be just as usual when I am not?" he said to himself, angrily. "Why did she go on about that fellow of a lord, whom I suppose her mother wants her to marry, pretending she liked him, and calling him her friend! *Friend*, indeed! he will soon see what sort of friend I will be to him! She might have given me just a look or a smile to show me it was all right, and then I shouldn't have been jealous; but no, she must needs toss her head and call him her friend! Oh! I am very glad I wouldn't take her hand. Sweet little hand! how I should like to cover it with kisses! Oh! my darling, my beautiful darling! I wonder if there is the faintest hope in heaven and earth for me!"

And here poor Dick, having reached the riverside, and being, as he imagined, secure from all observation, flung himself down by the waters of the Lennan, and

groaned all his trouble aloud into the calm and friendly bosom of his mother earth.

But there was just one window at Strathendale Castle from which this particular spot was still visible, and that was the window of Ida's own bedroom.

A long time had Mademoiselle Clothilde, the French lady's-maid, to wait for her young mistress this morning, and very hungry and thirsty did Bully become before he received his fresh seed and water.

Ida was leaning out of her window watching Dick Forrester's departing form across the park; she could tell by the way he strode along, striking right and left with his stick, how angry he was.

"It was *cruel* of him not to shake hands—horribly cruel!" she said to herself, indignantly. "I said nothing so very dreadful; he need not have gone away in anger like that," and the spoilt heiress, whose lightest word had always been law to those about her, was actually in tears because Dick Forrester, "from The Cottage," had been harsh to her.

And then she saw him reach the riverside and fall down with his face upon his arms, and she knew that he must be very unhappy.

"Oh! poor Dick!—poor Dick!" she cried, tremblingly, "how I wish I dared run down and comfort him!" and all her womanly heart went out in compassion to the man whose love she had wounded. But she did not venture to go out after him, for there was her mother; and besides, was she not Miss Greythorne of Strathendale, in whom such forward conduct would be highly unbecoming!

CHAPTER III.

LORD MANNERING'S DESTINY.

The express train was flying rapidly northwards, bearing to the banks of the Lennan one of the principal actors in my story. A man, tall and slight—so slight as to suggest physical weakness—leant back, half asleep, in the corner of the railway carriage. He was very fair, with hair and mustache that were almost flaxen, and his face was thin, and somewhat pale, but there was a certain amount of intellectual power in the high forehead; and a permanent sadness about the lines of of the eyes and mouth rendered the face an interesting one even to a casual observer.

There was one other person in the carriage, an elderly lady, who by her very striking likeness to her companion, might be recognized at a glance to be his mother. Tall and thin like her son, there was yet in the old lady's face a vitality and an energy that were lacking in the young man's. Her restless, eager eyes were full of life. His, on the contrary, although they resembled hers in form and color, were languid and dreamy, and full of faint, dim fancies and visions, that had nothing to do with the practical concerns of this world.

Whilst the train rushed on with a ceaseless roar, the son was dreaming vaguely—the mother was planning actively.

"Florian, are you asleep?" she said presently.

"No, mother," rousing himself a little; "not exactly."

"Then, my dear, talk to me a little bit. We must be nearly at Crayfirth Junction, where you and I have to part. We are due there in twenty minutes."

Lord Mannering consulted his watch.

"Yes, in twenty minutes, I should say. Well, mother?"

"My dear, I hope you understand the importance of this visit to Strathendale?"

The young man stretched his arms up over his head, and stifled a yawn.

"Is it important? Well, yes, I daresay it is."

"Your having accepted Lady Cressida's invitation to go there is, after the attentions which you paid to her daughter during the season, tantamount to proposing to her."

"By Jove!"—with a slight animation—"do you think so?"

"Of course I think so. Miss Greythorne's parents will think so—she herself. There cannot be the smallest doubt in their minds concerning your intentions."

"By Jove!" ejaculated his lordship again slowly. "So I may consider myself booked at last!"

"Is there any good reason why you should object to considering yourself 'booked,' as you call it?" inquired his mother, with some sharpness.

Lord Mannering made a slight grimace, and then he laughed.

"No. I suppose it must have come sooner or later," he answered.

"Surely, Florian, you can find no fault with so charming a girl as Ida Greythorne!" cried his mother, impatiently. "Satiated and *blasé* as you are, even you must see what a treasure of a wife she will be to any man!"

"My dear mother, I assure you I am far from depreciating Miss Greythorne."

"She has beauty, family, and money."

"Quite true."

"She is well brought up; her manners are charming."

"Without doubt."

"You seemed to like her extremely."

"I do."

"And she seems quite devoted to you."

"Hum!" rather more doubtfully.

"And, above all, your grandfather thoroughly approves of her."

Lord Mannering's grandfather was the Earl of Wilmerton. His father being dead, Florian was his grandfather's heir. Lord Wilmerton was a strict and autocratic old gentleman, and there had been several incidents in his grandson's career which he had anything but approved of, much to Lady Mannering's annoyance, as upon her devoted head were usually poured out the full vials of grand-paternal indignation.

There had been notably one instance, when the youthful Viscount Mannering, at the age of twenty, had returned from an Eastern tour, accompanied by a Persian lady of great beauty, but of obscure origin, who could converse in no respectable Christian language, but whom he had professed his fixed determi-

nation of turning into Viscountess Mannering, with the least possible delay, according to the rites of the English Church.

On that occasion Lord Wilmerton had, not unnaturally, been very irate indeed. There had been some frightful family scenes; and in the end the Persian lady had been sent off, under strong escort, back to her own country; and the despairing lover, seeing that he could not help himself, recovered her loss with an amazing rapidity.

But it was long before poor Lady Mannering heard the last of it. That wretched Persian woman was cast in her teeth for many a long year afterwards; and at every fresh delinquency committed by her well-beloved but somewhat eccentric son, the old man was in the habit of remarking to her,—

"Just what I should have expected! Your son, my lady, is a born idiot! Did anybody possessing two grains of common sense ever want to bring a jabbering Persian slave home to England in order to marry her?"

And yet the dearest wish of the old man's heart was to see his grandson suitably married before he died. He was particular, however, and none of the ladies to whom Florian had paid any slight preliminary attentions had hitherto met with his approbation.

One was too tall, another was too short. Of a third he would say, What was the good of bringing him to look at a woman with a thick ankle! Of a fourth, the pretty daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, Was it likely he was going to consent to a soap-boiler's daughter becoming a Countess of Wilmerton!

What a comfort it was, after so much difficulty,

that here, in the person of Ida Greythorne, was at last a young lady of whom the old earl grumblingly affirmed that, as girls go, she wasn't so bad, and that Florian had better marry her, as "He might well do worse."

From that moment Lady Mannering was set upon the match. She had done all she could to bring the young people together in London; and it was she who had urged her son to accept the invitation to Strathendale, which she meant to result in so much.

"I think, my dear, that you are bound to make Miss Greythorne an offer of marriage," she said furthermore to him in the train.

"Then I suppose it must be done," was the not very enthusiastic answer.

Lady Mannering got up and kissed her son on the forehead. She was not a demonstrative mother as a rule, but she felt that the occasion demanded some slight display of affection.

"You will have a very sweet and lovely wife, my dear boy, and one that I am persuaded you will have just cause to be proud of."

"She is good-looking enough, but I never cared for fair women," said the viscount.

"That is pure childishness," answered his mother, coldly, resuming her seat. She had not forgotten that that horrible Persian creature had been dark as Erebus—only one degree removed, indeed, from being a *black!* as she had told herself with disgust.

Then came the junction where Lady Mannering had to get out, in order to travel on by a branch line to the house of some friends where she was going to pay

a visit. Lord Mannering did all that was necessary in seeing his mother and her maid, and the luggage, safely across to another platform; but there was no time for more private conversation, nor, indeed, could any have taken place, because of the maid. He parted from his mother and resumed his own seat, his train being the first to start again. He continued his journey northwards, and after an hour more of uneventful traveling found himself and his valet, his portmanteau and his gun-case, safely landed upon the platform of the little station that was seven miles from Strathendale Castle.

A groom came forward and touched his hat to him.

"Mr. Greythorne thought you would like the dog-cart, my lord, as it's such a fine evening; and there's a cart for your servant and luggage."

"All right," answered his lordship, laconically, and mounting the dog-cart he took the reins and drove swiftly away from the dust and heat of the railway into the cool, shady lanes, bordered with woods and flecked by the warm glow of the August setting sun. Woods, rocks, distant moors purple with heather, tumbling, brawling streams, rabbits scuttling across the white road in front of him—it was a lovely country and a lovely road—and a more ardent lover than was Lord Mannering might have been excused for making but little haste to reach his lady-love's presence, and for lingering delightedly upon so charming a road. As it was, he was in no hurry at all—he was not particularly anxious to gaze upon Ida's lovely face—he knew she would be there whenever he arrived; moreover, it was uncomfortable, he reflected, to reach

a place long before your luggage and your valet; and the conveyance which bore these necessities of life was of course slower in traveling than the dog-cart, and was already some way behind.

There was plenty of time before dinner-time—no occasion to hurry. So he allowed the horse to walk up all the hills, and to pursue but a very leisurely jog-trot in the flat intervals between them, as, with the eye of a keen lover of nature, he drank in the beauty of the country through which he was passing.

Mannering was something of a poet—he had already published a small volume, entitled *Songs and Sonnets, by an Idler*, that had created a furore of admiration amongst his women-friends, and one or two not unfavorable critiques—written by friends, of course—in the Society papers. Upon the strength of this maiden success he was meditating a more adventurous flight into the fields of poesy; and already a description of the country through which he was driving struck him as holding out many inducements for a felicitous rendering of his opening cantos.

By-and-by the Lennan itself came in sight—a whole sweep of its tumbled waters, with the steep, wooded banks on either side, and a distant peep of the purple moorland, whence its streams arose, beyond. Lord Mannering was enchanted by his first glimpse of the beautiful river. Mr. Greythorne's groom could not imagine why the dog-cart was suddenly stopped short at the top of the hill, whilst his lordship gazed down enraptured for full five minutes upon the scene before him.

He drove very slowly down the road that led to the

level of the water-side. It is just at this place that the bridge crossed the river; that is to say, three miles from Strathendale. And just as he reached the bridge, Lord Mannering perceived a female figure leaning over the parapet at the further side of it. A brown holland dress, a broad, shady straw hat, and a glittering silver buckle at her waist—that was all he could see at that distance; but beyond all manner of doubt, what he saw told him that the solitary figure in the landscape was a lady.

"Can it be Ida come out to meet me?" he asked himself, and there was a distinct shade, not of pleasure, but of annoyance in his mind, as the idea presented itself to him. "No, it is too tall for Ida," he added, on further inspection. "I wonder who she can be!"

In another minute he was close to her. The lady leant with both elbows upon the parapet of the bridge, and looked down over the waters of the Lennan. She did not move nor turn her head at the sound of wheels behind her; she seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the landscape before her. She was in reality so deeply buried in her own thoughts that in the tumult of the waters below she did not even hear the advancing dog-cart.

All Lord Mannering could see of her—and he looked at her sharply—was a coil of dusky black hair at the nape of her neck; a brown, well-shaped hand supporting her cheek; and a tall and graceful figure which, bent forward as it was against the bridge, displayed its perfections to full advantage.

That was all he seemed destined to see of her, when a small and utterly unforeseen accident stepped in—

as such accidents sometimes do—and by its results altered the whole existence of Florian, Viscount Mannering.

The dog-cart had already passed the motionless young lady upon the bridge, when a small boy, hitherto invisible, rising from the river-brink on the further side, flung up a handful of long wet reeds that he had been gathering upon the road. The bundle of brown water-plants—tied up together and collected for the urchin's grandmother, who dealt in simple country drugs and nostrums, prepared by herself from herbs and water-plants, in whose virtues she believed—flung up over the side of the bridge, came flying down in front of the dog-cart. The horse shied violently, and then backed, and the wheels grazed up against the brown holland dress of the young lady upon the other side. A few cuts of the whip speedily restored the horse to a sense of his duty, the groom jumped down to his head, and Lord Mannering in one instant was by the side of the lady whom he had so unintentionally alarmed.

"I beg ten thousand pardons—I trust you are not hurt," he began hurriedly.

"Thank you, the wheel did not touch me—see it has only just soiled my dress—pray do not distress yourself," and there smiled up at him the dark eyes of the most beautiful woman, thought Mannering, he had ever seen in his life. He had met his destiny!

CHAPTER IV.

DINNER AT STRATHENDALE.

MANNERING looked round the dinner-table at Strathendale that evening with a distinct sense of disappointment. The party assembled at the castle was, nevertheless, a pleasant and cheery one. There were two Miss Tempests, friends of Ida's, both pretty and both well dressed, with plenty of small talk always kept ready to hand suitable for any comer. There was a Yorkshire baronet and his wife, Sir James and Lady Heywood—Sir James very fond of sport, and still more fond of talking about it; and his wife, still young and attractive, and bent upon making herself agreeable—quite as ready to talk of the prospects of grouse with her host, who had taken her in to dinner, and who sat on her left, as to flirt with the good-looking young Guardsman, who sat upon her right. This gentleman, however, a Captain de Crecy, had been told off to escort Ida, and thought himself too fortunate in his position to waste much attention upon Lady Heywood and her smiles. There was also another young man, Mr. Lawley, languid of manner and empty of soul, who had been consigned to the youngest Miss Tempest, the eldest being in charge of Sir James Heywood. Lord Mannering had of course taken in his hostess, and the fortunes of the table had placed the second Miss Tempest on his other side. Laura Tempest was as full

of energy as her companion was devoid of it—she had gentle enthusiasms about everything and everybody. She had often met Lord Mannering in town, and she was ready to chatter to him upon every conceivable subject in the most voluble manner. But she did not interest him at all. He only looked round the table, and felt that he had expected something that was not there.

Florian had made up his mind, from the very moment when his gaze had met those beautiful dark eyes belonging to the young lady in brown holland, whom he had so nearly run over in the dog-cart, that the owner of them must be one of the guests staying at Strathendale Castle. Why he should have fancied so, it is difficult to say, but we are all prone to imagine that things will turn out as we desire, and the wish, in this case, was father to the thought. He had arrived at his journey's end in very good spirits, and had hurried over his toilet for dinner as much as that great functionary, his valet, would allow him to do, in order to be early in the drawing-room when the party assembled for dinner. Every time the door opened he looked sharply round, expecting to behold the entrance of the tall dark lady he had met upon the bridge; and when the party—ten in all—was complete, and dinner was announced, and he was expected to give his arm to Lady Cressida, he could not help being unreasonably annoyed with his own folly for being so unaccountably disappointed.

Then, of course, there was Ida, looking lovely, as he could not but own, in a pale cream-colored dress, that set off the exquisite fairness of her neck and arms—

she smiled sweetly and pleasantly at him; and Lord Mannering, remembering suddenly what he had promised his mother to do, recalled himself with an effort to a sense of his duty, and strove manfully to banish that dark-eyed vision from his thoughts.

"How do you think Ida is looking?" whispered Lady Cressida to him as they sat down.

"Charming—perfect, of course, as she always does!" he answered heartily.

"I am so sorry I couldn't manage to let her sit next to you," she continued, smiling; "but of course it would not do." There was an intimation of Lord Mannering having a right to the sole appropriation of Miss Greythorne in this speech which rather took his breath away—evidently the engagement was a foregone conclusion in Lady Cressida's mind. "Yes, the dear child has got all her roses back," she continued confidingly "I thought her looking very fagged and white at the end of the season, didn't you?"

Here Sir James Heywood called her ladyship's attention to the alarming condition of salmon rivers generally, and of his own in particular; and Miss Laura Tempest, who had been biding her time, dashed headlong into conversation with Lord Mannering, who, as she always told her friends, was "such a dear! and looked so delightfully romantic."

She rattled on for some minutes about every mutual London acquaintance they possessed. The men were all "so nice" and "such dear fellows," and the women were all delightful and lovely; for to do Laura justice, although she gossiped freely about her neighbors, and did possibly a good deal of harm by senseless chatter-

ing about their affairs, she seldom abused them or said a spiteful word about them.

It was quite enough for her that her companion answered "Yes" and "No" at stated intervals between the mouthfuls of his fish and his cutlets; but presently, following the bent of his own irrepressible thoughts, he interrupted her in the very middle of a long description of the fancy dress Lady Somebody wore at Lady Somebody Else's ball, in which she had looked "so sweet and charming—Mr. Farquahar said she was like a print out of some old book he had, an old novel, "Evelina" or "Clarissa," or something of that kind—that had a mob-cap, you know, and big curls, and he said that she—"

"Is there no other young lady staying in the house?" asked Lord Mannering, suddenly.

Laura Tempest stopped short in her animated description, and stared at him. Lord Mannering was very eccentric and queer—dear odd creature, of course; but still—well, in anybody else it would have been rather rude. Besides, she was astonished at his question.

"Any other young lady," she repeated slowly, "staying here?—at Strathendale, do you mean? There is only me and Alicia—that is, my sister—and Ida, of course! Why, Lord Mannering!"—laughing merrily—"how many more girls do you require? Are not three enough for you, and all determined to make much of you, too?"

"Of course—of course!—certainly!" he answered rather confusedly. "I only thought—I fancied, in fact, there was another! The truth is I met a lady along the road outside the park, on my way here—a dark

young lady, tall and very handsome—and I took it into my head that she must be staying here. You don't happen, I suppose, to know who she could be?"

"Not in the very least. Miss Greythorne is the only very handsome young lady I have ever heard of up in these regions. Oh! Lady Cressida"—bending suddenly forward across the corner of the table towards their hostess—"do tell Lord Mannering who a tall, handsome, dark lady can be whom he met on his road from the station! Who is the unknown beauty? I feel quite anxious to know."

"A tall, handsome, dark lady!" repeated Lady Cressida, wonderingly. "I really don't know! Where did you meet her, Lord Mannering?"

"A little way up the road, on the bridge across the river."

Lady Cressida still shook her head as if she could not possibly guess; and then Alicia Tempest, from the other side of the table, said,—

"Could it have been the girl from The Cottage, Lady Cressida? Did not Ida say she was very dark?"

Her ladyship made as though she had received a sudden revelation.

"Ah!" she exclaimed—"to be sure! It must have been poor Hester Forrester, from The Cottage! I declare I never thought of her! She is, certainly, *very* dark—quite swarthy, in fact!—though I am sure it is good of you to call her handsome, Lord Mannering; *I* certainly should not say she had much beauty, poor girl!"

"I think her singularly beautiful," answered his lordship, with a fervor which he in vain strove to conceal.

"And pray, Lady Cressida, why do you call this young lady 'poor'?"

Lady Cressida shrugged her shoulders carelessly, as though the topic was an utterly uninteresting one.

"Oh, I don't know! She is poor—they all are! Her father is a retired Indian colonel, and his wife is a very worthy woman; they have a large family, poor things, and hard work enough to make both ends meet. They are very good sort of people, the Forresters, in their way; but of course they are not at all in our set."

Here Ida's fresh young voice came from the other end of the table.

"What are you saying about the Forresters, mamma? Nothing but what is good, I hope? They are the dearest people, all of them; and Hester is the oldest friend I have in the world."

Lord Mannering never liked Ida Greythorne so well as at that minute.

"My dear," answered her mother, rather sharply, "of course I was saying no harm of them. They are very good people. I was only explaining to Lord Mannering that they are not quite—well, not quite—"

"They are quite—*quite* good enough for me, mamma! cried Ida, with a suddenly flushed face, and then Lord Mannering called out,—

"Quite right, Miss Greythorne! Stick up for your friends! I like people who do that!"

Lady Cressida turned to him, all smiles. She quite forgave him for his incautiously-expressed admiration of Hester Forrester.

"That is so like dear Ida! She is so generous, and so affectionate—she cannot bear a word spoken against

these young people, because they all played with her when they were little children; of course, being such near neighbors, it was natural the young ones should be together a great deal; and now dear Ida cannot quite see how different things are. But it is a fault on the right side, is it not, to be so friendly and kind to those beneath her? I am so glad you appreciate my dear child's good, noble heart!"

To this speech, which filled him with a vague indignation, Lord Mannering only muttered an inaudible reply, and the subject of the Forresters was dropped.

After dinner, however, when Florian went and took the chair by Ida's sofa, that seemed to have been left by general consent for him to fill, he revived the topic of his own accord.

"Tell me about your friend Miss Forrester?" he said to her in a low voice; "do you know, I thought you charming when you stood up for her at dinner-time!"

If Ida had expected anything of a more tender nature from her recognized admirer, after a month's absence from her side, she was too much conversant with the wisdom of this world to betray her disappointment; she turned to him at once, bright and smiling.

"Oh!" she said, "Hester is a charming girl, and she *is* so good! You have no idea how good she is—she is not a bit like me, idle, you know, and frivolous; she never wastes her time reading novels or chattering nonsense, as I do. She works so hard, and helps her mother with her housekeeping, and her younger brothers with their lessons—and she reads to her father and writes all his letters—and then she visits the poor,

and makes clothes for them, and goes to nurse them when they are sick, and oh! she does no end of good!"

"She has got, at anyrate, a very warm partisan in Miss Greythorne," said Lord Mannering, smiling at her pleasantly.

Ida looked down and played with her fan; she liked him—yes, decidedly she liked him, and then she believed him to be devoted to her, and his devotion flattered her; there was a little flutter at her heart when he praised her, for his praise was sweet to her. She knew that her parents wished her to marry him—she did not quite know, indeed, whether she wished it herself. As to *love*, she had not thought much about it. It was as yet an unknown mystery to her—she had never even considered whether she was what is called "in love" or not. But she was quite sure that she liked Lord Mannering very much, and lovers were as yet a pleasant novelty to her, of which she had not grown tired. She was, like many girls who only half know their mind, prepared to let herself be worshiped without being quite certain as to where the worshiping was likely to land her.

She was, of course, convinced that Lord Mannering worshiped her very sincerely and devotedly; she was, therefore, a little taken aback when he said to her,—

"Will you take me to see Miss Forrester? I should like to know her." Perhaps he caught the look of surprise in her blue eyes, for he hastened to add: "I want to know her because she is your friend, of course."

Ida looked quite satisfied; but she did not, nevertheless, feel very anxious to introduce Lord Mannering to Hester Forrester, for there was somebody else at The

Cottage who had not been mentioned, who was far more Ida's friend than was Hester; and there passed through her mind a doubt as to whether it would be quite wise and prudent to bring her aristocratic admirer to the very house where dwelt this other friend.

"It is safer not to let them clash," was Ida's wise reflection, made to herself with a little smile of self-consciousness—for she knew her own power already—although as yet she did not know her own heart.

CHAPTER V.

UNHAPPY LOVERS.

Now at this time Dick Forrester was very unhappy indeed. The days went by one by one, and there came to him no invitation to join the shooting-parties at Strathendale, such as Lady Cressida had promised him. Not that Dick wanted to go out shooting—far from it; for he had only an old gun—his father's—of an antique fashion, quite devoid of all modern innovations and improvements. With this weapon Dick shot badly enough, and was not at all able to hold his own amongst London men, with their bran new "Grants" and "Purdies." Dick considered shooting, under those circumstances, a painful and humiliating experience rather than a pleasure. He did not want to shoot; but he did want, with all his heart, to see Ida, and he knew that if he went out with the men from the Castle he must see her, either at starting or on coming home. Or possibly the ladies might join the men at lunch-time on the moorside; and there was always, again, the chance of his being asked to remain to dinner. But no invitation at all came to him. Seemingly he was forgotten. He knew that Lord Mannering was staying at Strathendale and a fury of jealousy filled him every time he thought of this man, whom a sure instinct had told him was his

rival. Once, indeed, he caught sight of him—and with Ida.

It was a non-shooting day, and they had gone out riding together. As Dick came swinging along a narrow shady lane the two horses crossed it from a side road a little way ahead of him, and went on before him. Neither rider perceived him, and in the impotence of his rage and anguish Dick was able to notice that they rode close—far too close—together, and that their conversation seemed to be so absorbing that the horses were almost left to their own devices.

Dick stood still, looking after them, nearly maddened with despair—there was something that was almost murderous in his mind.

"Poor, weak, narrow-chested, pale-faced creature!" he exclaimed wildly. "I could kill him with one grip of my hand!" and certainly at that moment he experienced a strong desire to do so.

As far as physique was concerned, there is no question that Dick had very much the best of it. Lord Mannering, pale and thin, small of bone and of sinew, narrow and slightly hollow in the chest, could hold no comparison whatever with the broad shoulders, the strong muscles, and the altogether manly build of Dick Forrester.

No woman, looking at the two men together, could have hesitated a moment between the two, for Dick was as handsome as a picture, and of that type of beauty which all women love, because it denotes strength. But, then, there was that title to weigh down the balance on Lord Mannering's side! and where is the woman who will not unconsciously be biassed by the

all-mighty power of rank? Even to Ida, nice-minded and thorough lady as she was, it was not without its fascination.

As Dick stood rooted to the spot, looking after the fast-vanishing riders, an old keeper, who had known him ever since his boyhood, came by.

"You be looking after the young mistress, Master Dick! Well, she do look a beauty, don't she, on the bay mare her papa gave her? And that is her young man, they say—and I ought to beg his pardon for calling him so, he being a lord—and a handsome-looking couple they will make coming out of Lennandale Church together some of these fine days, I'm thinking!"

"*Handsome* do you call *him?*" said Dick, scornfully, turning on his heel. "He's no match for her. Why, I could break every bone in his body with one hand, Jerry!"

The old man chuckled.

"Ay! so ye could, Master Dick—so ye could, I make no doubt, for you're wonderful good at boxing and such like, and he's but a poor wisp of a chap, for all that he's a lord! But there, you gentlefolks never has a chance with your fists. They ain't no sort of good to you, I'm thinking. The weak ones is as well off as the strong ones, seeing that it ain't the custom for you to be knocking each other about and giving each other black eyes."

"I wish to Heaven it were!" cried Dick, with such earnestness that even the old keeper could not help seeing that there was more than an ordinary dislike in his feeling towards Miss Ida's "young man," as he had called him.

But Dick was more miserable than ever after this chance encounter. He would not go to Strathendale whilst Lord Mannering was there unless he should be sent for. He was too proud for that. But he waited day after day, longing, with a vain and fruitless longing, that Ida would send him some token, some sign that she desired to see him.

But Ida made no sign; and poor Dick said to himself, bitterly, that she had forgotten him.

Ida had not forgotten. Only she was young, and she was happy, and life was very sweet to her, and she thought nothing of love, because it had never come to her—she only thought about enjoying herself.

There was one person to whom Dick's trouble was a sad and pitiful spectacle, and that was his sister Hester. Hester, gentle-hearted, sympathetic, saw plainly enough how it was with her brother. To her there was but one way for him out of a passion that was utterly hopeless—to meet his trouble like a man, and to overcome it.

"Dick," she said softly to him one twilight evening as he stood miserably leaning against the open window, staring across to the big house among the woods on the opposite side of the Lennan—"Dick, my dear, if I were you I would go away from home for a little. Don't you think it would be wisest?"

She laid her gentle, sisterly hand soothingly upon his arm.

"What good do you suppose that would do me?" he answered bitterly; "it is all the same wherever I go—and how can I go away now and leave him there?" and he nodded across to the Castle.

"Why can't you face the thing bravely, like a man?" she answered, a little impatiently. "My poor brother! cannot you see that it is all the same whoever is there—do you suppose that even if Lord Mannering were not there, there would not be some one else? Dick, for Heaven's sake, put Ida out of your head—her position in life is so different from yours—her parents will never allow her to show you any encouragement. Cease to struggle against a destiny that is utterly beyond your power to alter—she is bound to marry some one in her own position of life—why should you be at home to bear the pain of it? Go away before you have betrayed it to others as you have betrayed it to me, and forget her!"

He put up his hand quickly.

"Hush, Hester, you mean it kindly—but you don't understand things—you do not know what I know—that Ida loves me!"

"*Loves* you!"

"Yes—she does not know it herself—but her heart is mine!"

"My poor, dear Dick! you must be mad to think such a thing."

"I do not *think* it!" he answered quietly. "I *know* it—I have seen it in her eyes."

"Ida is a flirt! Don't look so furious, Dick—of course, I think her a dear, sweet girl, with many most charming qualities—but she has been a good deal flattered and spoiled in London, and if she has learned to play with an honest man's love and to pretend to return it, when she must know—"

And then Dick got very angry indeed, and refused to listen to his sister any longer.

"Do not speak to me any more about it," he said shortly. "You do not understand her or me!"

Meanwhile, at Strathendale things were going on from day to day without much visible alteration. The gentlemen shot all day; the ladies played lawn tennis, or rode or drove, wiling away the hours of their absence as best they could. Then came the evening, dinner, conversation, and a little music; the eldest Miss Tempest flirted with Mr. Lawley; Captain De Crecy, seeing that Ida was completely appropriated elsewhere, and that there was no chance for him, philosophically resigned himself to Lady Heywood, who, with the superior freedom of action accorded to married women, bore him off triumphantly from the young ladies of the party, and dragged him about at her chariot-wheels, as it were, in a state of quiescent and not ill-contented slavery. Laura Tempest chattered to everybody alike, but thought it at her heart rather hard that Lord Mannering should be so persistently deaf to her own charming and ever-ready powers of conversation. As to Lord Mannering, he hung over Ida's chair, turned over her music, lowered his voice when he spoke to her, singled her out markedly amongst all the other women—much as he had done half the season in town—but nothing more; he did not propose to her.

Ida liked him just as he was immensely—she wanted nothing more from him—his respectful adoration delighted her; she enjoyed all the prestige of having a lover without any of the practical inconvenience—she

desired nothing better than that things should go on like this for ever.

But if she was satisfied, so was not her mother. Lady Cressida waited anxiously from day to day, expecting to hear the news that Lord Mannering had declared himself ; and as day by day went on, and Ida had still nothing to confide to her maternal ears, she grew first uneasy, then disgusted, and finally she waxed downright angry.

"I have no patience with him!" she exclaimed to her husband. "What does he mean by hanging on day after day and never speaking?"

"I would not worry myself, my dear. Mannering is a deliberate sort of fellow, and takes things easy," answered her husband, who was of an easy temperament himself.

"A man has no business to take things easy, as you call it, when a girl's happiness depends upon it," said Lady Cressida, angrily.

"Do you really think Ida's happiness is at stake?" said her husband, with a slow, quiet smile. He did not interfere much with his wife and daughter, but he had his opinions too, which he wisely kept to himself.

"Certainly it is," answered his wife, sharply. "She will never have a better or more suitable chance."

"I quite agree with you. The match in every way would be an excellent one."

"It must be Ida's own fault," continued Lady Cressida. "She does not give him sufficient encouragement. I must speak to her."

"If you take my advice you will certainly not do that," said Mr. Greythorne, with some earnestness.

But Lady Cressida considered that she knew best. She told her husband in so many words—polite, lady-like words, of course, but still amounting to the same thing—to mind his own business and allow her to manage things her own way: and she sought her daughter then and there in her own room.

Ida was sitting listlessly by the window in her boudoir, looking idly out across the valley towards The Cottage.

"My dear child, I think it is time this uncomfortable state of things should be ended," began Lady Cressida, sitting down by her daughter and taking her hand.

"What state of things, mamma?"

"Between you and Lord Mannering. It is time that you encouraged him to speak out plainly."

"What *can* you mean, mamma?—how can I encourage him?—what is there for him to speak about?"

Ida looked the very picture of indignant innocence.

"My dear, don't be childish," said her mother. "You know quite as well as I do that Lord Mannering is here in the character of a suitor for your hand."

"He has never told me so."

"That has nothing to do with it—he *means* to tell you, of course; and if your manner were more gracious and encouraging to him he would doubtless speak out at once. It is your fault, Ida, that he is so slow; you are cold, or else you are too amiable to the other men. Now, pray, this evening make it your business to lead him on a little—some men require a little help from a woman—Lord Mannering evidently does. You might

give him a flower from your bouquet, or take him out after dinner for a stroll in the gardens."

"My dear mother!" laughed Ida, "you seem to expect me to make love to the man!"

"You need not put things so coarsely, Ida. There are many little ways in which a lady may with perfect propriety let a gentleman see that she is ready to listen favorably to his proposals."

"But I don't at all want to make Lord Mannering propose to me, mamma. He is very nice as he is—why should I want him to change? To tell you the truth, if he proposed to me I think it very likely I should refuse him. I don't believe—I haven't thought about it much yet—but I really don't much think I have the least intention of marrying Lord Mannering or anybody else."

Lady Cressida was thunderstruck. Here was an obstacle upon which she had never counted! That Ida herself should frustrate her plans by declaring that she did not intend to marry Lord Mannering was a thing which she had certainly never imagined possible.

"You must be mad, Ida! There could be no better match for you in all England!" she began indignantly.

But Ida put up her hand quickly.

"Pray do not speak in that way, mamma! If you do you will only disgust me utterly with the whole thing! I like Lord Mannering very well, but I have never thought much about marriage. Perhaps I shall think about it more now you have suggested it; but I cannot think it nice, or even ladylike, to discuss such a question, even with one's mother, before a man has himself said anything. If you don't mind, I'm going

out for a little into the garden. I should like to be alone."

She put on her hat and went out, leaving Lady Cressida in a state of much disturbance and discomfiture.

Ida wandered out into the gardens in a state of mind which she was at a lost to understand or to account for to herself. She felt angry, and indignant, and uncomfortable, and so unreasonably disturbed and disquieted, that she did not know what could be the matter with her.

"Why could not mamma leave me alone?" she said to herself. "I was quite happy before. She should not say such things to me!"

She thought it was her mother's injudicious remarks that had so aroused her into angry rebellion. But there was something in her own heart, over and above what her mother had said to her, which had awakened something new and unusual within her.

As she passed across the lawn, the two Tempest girls called out to her to come and join their game of lawn tennis.

"Come, Ida," they called out to her—"come and play with us! Where have you been all the morning? We thought you were never coming!"

But Ida only shook her head, and passed on among the flower-beds towards the shrubberies.

She did not feel in the mood to join in their game or their brainless chatter.

She went on alone by herself into the woods, feeling for the first time in all her young life that things were going wrong with her. Her mother's words had somehow torn away the veil that had hidden her own heart

from herself. She began to understand that, whilst she had been laughing, and smiling, and jesting away the days, she had been unconsciously approaching daily nearer and nearer to a crisis in her life—that the time was at hand when she must awake up out of the dreamy unreality of her girlhood and face her future boldly—when she must either obey her parents or take her own line resolutely, and defy them. The whole of her proud young nature stood up in angry rebellion against the idea of encouraging a man to make love to her. But if he should make love to her without such encouragement, what then?

She wandered away farther and farther from the house. Instinctively her steps were bent towards the river, and she only paused when she came out of the shadows of the sheltering trees upon the banks of the brawling, tumbling stream, whose every eddy had been her friend and companion ever since her childhood.

She sat down on a great moss-grown rock by the river-side, rested her chin upon her hand, looked away over to the small gray gables of The Cottage amongst the woods across the Lennan, and sighed.

Then suddenly there fell a shadow between her and the foaming waters, and Dick Forrester stood before her!

CHAPTER VI.

THE QUARREL.

Ida sprang joyfully to her feet and held out both her hands. All at once the disquietude of her heart seemed to be at rest, and half her trouble seemed to have vanished.

"Oh! Dick, how glad I am to see you! How long it is since you have been on our side of the water!"

But Dick was in one of his worst and stormiest moods—an evil spirit of bitterness and rage possessed him. He did not even look at her. Had he done so—had he seen her sweet, troubled face light up with joy at the sight of him, or the wistful, pleading violet eyes that looked up so longingly towards him—had he seen them he must have been melted by the something new and tender he would have read in their sweet depths. The tremulous lip, the soft, anxious brow must have touched him to the heart, and roused all the love and gentleness within him. But unluckily he did not look at her. He kept his eyes steadfastly turned away, fixed upon the eddying and swirling waters. He said to himself,—

"If I look at her face I shall show her all my weakness and my misery. Her loveliness will drive me mad! I will not look at her."

And then he answered her, bitterly and roughly,—

"Is it a long time? It is exactly ten days since I

have been over the river. But I dare say it has been short enough to you. You have been quite happy and contented."

"Why do you say that? How can you know? You might at least have come to see us," she said rather tremulously.

Already the yearning in her lovely eyes was chilled and driven back within her.

"I don't go where I'm not invited. If you had wanted to see me you would have sent for me, I suppose."

"Oh! Dick, how can you be so unjust? How could *I*, a girl, *send* for you? And you know that papa and mamma are always glad to see you."

"Are they?"—very bitterly. "Not, I imagine, when there is the fine lover there dancing attendance on you."

And then all the softness and tenderness died out of her heart; and in her soreness and her wounded indignation she spoke angrily to him.

"How dare you speak to me like that! What right have you?"

"I have no right. Did I ever pretend to have any right over you? I may be poor, and I may be beneath you, but at any rate you cannot say—your mother even cannot say—that I have ever stepped over the barrier that divides me from you and yours."

And down in the depths of her troubled maiden heart it had been words of love that she had yearned with a passionate eagerness to hear from his lips!

He looked at her now at last, but it was too late. There was no womanly softness, no pleading tender-

ness in her lovely face now, only a cold, hard anger and indignation, and something, too, of scorn.

At that moment Ida felt as if all her world—her mother, her lover, her very self—had turned against her own better nature, and was conspiring together to ruin her happiness.

"I will not answer you," she said contemptuously, "when you speak so unjustly and so untruly. Who has ever reproached you with your poverty? or when have I ever implied that we were anything but equals? It is a mean, miserable pride that makes you speak like that, Dick. You ought to be ashamed of such words!"

"It is easy to lecture me, when you drive me half mad!" cried Dick, distractedly. "Every day I hear of you—and—that fellow! Your names are coupled together! the very gamekeepers and servants are jabbering over your love affairs! You only want me to come to Strathendale that you may flaunt your happiness in my eyes! Why don't you ask me at once to your wedding?"

For an instant her face half softened again, and a flush leaped up suddenly into her cheeks.

"Are you jealous, Dick?" she said softly and shyly.

But Dick's better angel was not apparently minded to befriend him on this particular occasion. Once again he was blind, and deaf, and senseless to that which he should have seen, and heard, and felt.

"Jealous!" he repeated, scornfully and sneeringly—"jealous! Not I! What is there that any man can desire in you beyond your lovely face—your lovely figure? You beautiful, heartless, soulless thing! Do

you think I envy any man who has trusted his life to *you?*—to a woman who smiles a man's heart away, and then laughs and leaves him to the blackness of his own despair, without a pang of regret or remorse? No, I am not jealous; I only pity your husband!"

Could any woman forgive, or even answer, such words? Ida could not. White to the very lips, she stood up before him for one minute with wildly-flashing eyes; then, like a voice that was not her own, there fell from those white, rigid lips one short, hoarsely-uttered sentence—"I pray that I may never see you again in this world!" then she turned swiftly away from him, and fled upwards out of his sight, amongst the dark shadows of the woods above them.

But Dick had been mad with rage and jealousy. He had not known what he had said to her, nor realized the import of the insulting words he had cast at her. He had been possessed by the notion that her engagement to Lord Mannering was a fact. As he had walked down the village that very morning he had heard the people talking of it; and one man had stepped forward from a group of idlers and had asked him respectfully if he knew when the wedding was likely to take place. It had been all too much for him; and then he had met her, and all his rage and fury had burst forth. There is no passion so ugly and so distorting as jealousy; it drives a man to the unreasoning madness of an infuriated animal. Dick, in his anger, did not remember that, although he loved Ida, he had never spoken to her of love; were she engaged fifty times over to another man, she would still have broken no vows and been false to no love for

him, for he had never exacted any from her. Only, perhaps, there had been a tacit, silent understanding between them in the old days—the days when he had wandered about the country with her and had carried her backwards and forwards across the river; but of late years there had been no words of love between them, and Dick's cruelty to her was only equaled by his injustice.

When she had left him and gone from him, with those terrible words upon her lips, something of what he had done came vaguely upon him. He called after her wildly,—

"Ida! Ida! come back!" but she did not turn, perhaps she did not hear him. She fled hastily and swiftly, and never paused until she had found the shelter of her own room.

That evening the whole party at the Castle was much distressed at the absence of the young lady of the house. Ida was locked up in her own room, and refused to come down to dinner. In vain her mother knocked at her door and pleaded admittance; Ida would not let her in.

"I have a very bad headache," she said, and her voice sounded choked and unnatural. "I shall not come down at all to-night."

"But, my dear, will you not let me in?"

"No; I don't want to see any one—please leave me alone."

"At least let me send you up some dinner."

"I could not touch a mouthful. Pray do not send up anything."

"Will you not let Clothilde come to you and bathe your head?"

"No; I want no one—do leave me alone."

That was all that Lady Cressida could extract from her self-imprisoned daughter. She was quite at a loss to imagine what could be the matter with her—for, of course, she knew the headache was only an excuse. Is not headache always the convenient plea for heartache which comes glibly and lightly to a woman's lips?

What could be the matter with Ida? Was it possible that her own words in the morning had had such a serious effect upon her? Was she meditating rebellion or submission to the maternal will? Lady Cressida pondered deeply and anxiously, but could find nothing that could give her a clue to the mystery.

She went down-stairs amongst her guests with an anxious and preoccupied brow.

"Poor Ida was so unwell," she said; "quite prostrate, in fact; such a racking headache, she was hardly able to speak, far less to get up—it must be the change in the weather—a night's rest would doubtless restore her."

There were many polite regrets and expressions of sympathy, and Laura Tempest seemed almost ready to dissolve into tears over "poor, sweet, darling Ida suffering above whilst we are all eating as if nothing was the matter."

But after awhile everybody resumed the usual jokes, and the conversation flowed on as merrily and easily as ever.

After dinner, however, when the gentlemen joined

the ladies, Lord Mannering came up to Lady Cressida with a face of some concern.

"I trust it is nothing serious with Miss Greythorne," he said quite anxiously. "Is it only a headache?"

Now, if Lady Cressida had especially desired the intervention of Providence in behalf of her schemes for Ida's future, she could have wished for no more fortunate thing to have happened than this opportunity of hinting to her daughter's suitor that he might possibly be in some measure to blame for his dilatoriness. She was above the vulgarity of seeking such an occasion, but the occasion having presented itself, she was far too clever a woman to allow it to be wasted. When Lord Mannering asked if Ida's complaint was only a headache, Lady Cressida went through an expressive little pantomime.

She first of all shrugged her shoulders—as if to say, "How am I to know?"—then she sighed a little—meaning, "It is sad, isn't it! that she should make herself ill"—then finally she smiled, as though she would have said, "But young ladies' troubles are not incurable." It was all done without a word; but so plainly that Lord Mannering, who had a kind heart and would not hurt a fly if he could help it, looked quite shocked.

"She is not unhappy, is she?" he asked in a whisper, and with a look of dismay that was almost comic.

"A little, perhaps," said Lady Cressida, with another pathetic smile. "Uncertainty, you know, is always trying to the young!"

Nobody could have said that Lady Cressida had been guilty of the vulgar error of asking a gentleman his

intentions! And yet Lord Mannering said immediately,—

"Will you kindly give me the opportunity of speaking to Miss Greythorne alone to-morrow morning, Lady Cressida?"

And Lady Cressida, as she bent her head in assent, put forth her hand and pressed that of her future son-in-law with a smile of contentment.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSAL.

Lord Mannering, in asking Lady Cressida to afford him the opportunity of a private interview with Ida, made the request under a sudden and very earnest realization of duty. His wooing had been half-hearted and not very ardent. Nevertheless, he had been fully conscious of the fact that Miss Greythorne was a charming young lady, and that he would do a very wise thing in making her his wife—that she had money enough to set him at ease in worldly matters, and beauty and grace enough to adorn the station in life in which she would be placed. Moreover, he was not oblivious of the fact that the marriage would delight his mother and find favor in the eyes of his aged grandfather.

So much Lord Mannering had known and acknowledged to himself before he had come down to Strathendale—ostensibly for the shooting. But ever since he had been there he had felt an unaccountable coldness and want of eagerness in the matter. Ida, it is true, was as charming as ever; indeed, seen in the freedom of her country home, she was even more attractive than amongst the bustle and excitement of a London life; but Lord Mannering's reluctance to speak out and settle the question became greater than ever; he himself hardly knew what it was that made

him so cold and impassive to the many charms of the lovely heiress. Perhaps he hardly realized how often, sleeping and waking, there came before his eyes a vision of a very different nature; of dark, dreamy eyes that haunted him; of a proud, sweet face, rich with southern hues, that once seen, and once only, he had never been able to forget. Lord Mannering had feebly and vaguely endeavored to analyze his own feelings; but that which had not hitherto even entered into his own mind had been the consideration of Ida's.

When, therefore, Lady Cressida had so cleverly, and with such perfect good-breeding, hinted to him that her daughter was unhappy and even unwell on his account, by reason of the dilatoriness of his love-making, the inference that Ida was pining away for love of him came upon him with a positive shock. Mannering, who was keenly sensitive in matters of honor and gentleman-like conduct, as at once conscience-stricken, and took himself severely to task concerning his conduct to Miss Greythorne.

It struck him in a new and hitherto unconsidered light, for he had never before speculated upon what might be her feelings in the matter. He had dangled after her half the season; he had followed her to her country home; he had singled her out by marked and pointed attentions, so that, as he well knew, their names had been constantly coupled together, and people spoke confidently and smilingly, almost to his very face, of "the match" that was expected to ensue; and in all this he had never given a thought as to whether Ida herself really cared for him, but had taken it for granted, he hardly knew why, that she, like him-

self, regarded the affair as a convenient and suitable arrangement which, without being displeasing to the principal actors, would be eminently gratifying to the families on both sides.

But if Ida loved him ! Good Heavens ! how materially the case was altered ; and how cold and cruel must his conduct appear in her sight !

All night long the picture of Ida, pale and distracted by just doubts of her lover's truth and earnestness, weeping, perhaps, the tears of a love-sick maiden, or tossing to and fro in a fever of miserable uncertainty upon her pillow, kept Lord Mannering awake with a haunting sense of his own heartlessness, and banished sleep effectually from his eyes. In his compassion and pity for her he almost fancied that he loved her ; and it is certain that, for the first time since he had slept at Strathendale, Hester Forrester took no part in his short and troubled dreams.

It was, therefore, with feelings of some impatience and eagerness to repair his past errors, and to make up to her for what he imagined she had suffered on his account, that he awaited her the following morning after breakfast in Lady Cressida's morning-room, where she had told him that she would send her daughter to speak to him.

Ida had not appeared at breakfast, so that they met for the first time that day. She came into the room pale as a ghost, with dark circles that betokened tears and sleeplessness round her lovely eyes, but with a fixed and resolute look in her face, as though she had held a long struggle with some dire temptation, and had remained the conqueror over herself.

Her mother had partly prepared her for what was to come.

"Lord Mannering has asked me to give him the opportunity of speaking to you alone, Ida. He spoke to me last night very nicely and properly," she had said to her daughter.

Ida smiled bitterly and hardly.

"It is well," she said to herself. "I shall not now have time for any weak-hearted repentance. What I have resolved will be easy to do."

"Very well, mamma," she answered aloud, coldly and apathetically. "Where am I to see him?"

"I told him to go into my room after breakfast; you had better go to him there; and, Ida, I need not impress upon you the importance of the interview that is before you, nor the earnest hopes of your father and myself that you may give Lord Mannering a right and favorable answer."

Ida put up her hand.

"That will do, mamma. I quite understand you."

"But, my dear child, I must beg you to tell me what your answer—"

But Ida interrupted her impatiently.

"I can tell you nothing!" she cried. "I shall be guided entirely by circumstances."

"What! in a matter of such importance as this—a matter that concerns your whole future happiness?"

Ida looked at her strangely.

"Suppose we leave my future happiness out of the question," she said. "Where is Lord Mannering—in your room, did you say? I will go to him at once."

She fastened a crimson rose that lay upon her dressing-table into the bosom of her dress, and went.

Perhaps it was that crimson rose that made her look so deadly pale as she entered—the rose that lay among the white laces of her morning dress. Lord Mannering thought he had never seen so great an alteration in any one is so few hours.

He took her hand with the deepest concern and led her to a chair.

"Do you feel any better? How pale you are! I am afraid you are far from well?"

"I have not slept well," murmured Ida. "I am better than I was. I shall be all right by-and-by, I dare say."

She sat down, and there was a slight pause. He stood beside her chair, looking down at her white, suffering face, and felt that if he were the cause of it he must be a brute indeed.

Then suddenly he knelt down by the side of her chair and took one of her hands between his.

"Ida," he said earnestly, "you know what I want to say to you, don't you?"

She nodded, looking down and crumpling up the lace trimmings of her dress between her fingers.

"Ida, will you be my wife?"

She was quite silent for the space of half a minute. He looked at her in some surprise. There was no sudden rush of glad, warm color into her face, no half-shy and happy upward glance of her downcast eyes to meet his; only the same pallor, the same unalterable seriousness in her bent face and drooping eyelids. He was surprised; it was not what he had expected.

"Are you not going to answer me?" he said at length, in a voice of disappointment; for when a man imagines himself to be devotedly loved, it is a shock to his vanity, if not to his heart, to find that his tender addresses do not call forth any corresponding emotion.

Then Ida lifted her eyes at last and met his; but there was no gladness, no embarrassment even, in their depths, and there was no maiden-flush of delighted love upon her face.

"Will you let me ask you a question, Lord Mannering, first, before I give you an answer to yours?"

"Certainly—as many as you like," he said readily; but he rose from the humble, kneeling posture by her side, and took a chair near her; almost unconsciously, too, he dropped her hand.

"Tell me, then, in making me this proposal, are you actuated by a great and real love for me?"

The question was so strange and so unexpected that Lord Mannering hardly knew what to say. He stammered and turned crimson.

"Really, my dear Ida, I am quite surprised—quite astonished, that you should ask such a thing. Of course, when a man asks a woman to marry him—of course he must be actuated by affection."

"Is that your experience of life, Lord Mannering? I am afraid I have not been able to take quite so charitable a view of the matrimonial contracts of my neighbors." She laughed a little.

"I do not understand you," he said, reddening deeply all over his fair face. "You must know that I am fond of you."

"That is no answer to my question. Do you love me

with your whole soul and heart?—so dearly that if I were to send you away you would half die of it?"

"I earnestly hope that you will *not* send me away, though in such a case—well, I don't think, perhaps, that one dies of that kind of thing."

"That will do!" said Ida, smiling. "Lord Mannering, I am very glad we understand each other. I am quite sure you have a great esteem and a fair amount of affection for me."

"A great deal of affection, Ida, I assure you."

"Well, if you like it better, we will say a great deal of affection. I am sure you would not have done me the honor of asking me to be your wife had not this been the case. You are fond of me; but you are not violently or absorbingly in love with me. I am very glad of it. Had you loved me devotedly I could not have been so wicked as to marry you. As it is," and she stretched out her hand to him with a calm, friendly smile—"as it is, I think we shall suit each other very well, and be very happy together; and—yes, I will be your wife."

Lord Mannering took the outstretched hand—what else indeed could he do?—and bending over it, he pressed it to his lips. But I find it hard to describe the state of utter bewilderment and of stupefied chaos to which his mind was reduced during the performance of this first lover-like action.

He had expected to comfort a tender-souled girl whose heart had been breaking for him; to dry her tears, to call back smiles and blushes to her pale, wan face, to catch her broken words of love and devotion. All this, although he loved her not, would have been very sweet to him, and would have assuredly endeared her to him;

for where is the man who can remain cold and impassive when a lovely and adoring woman casts her arms about his neck and pours out the riches of her young heart into his not unwilling ears? It was a prospect that had the keenest attractions for him. But how different was the reality! Here was a woman who began by coldly questioning his affection, who after having, much against his will, extracted from his reluctant lips an admission of his own want of great affection for her, went on to say that she was glad of it, and that by reason of it she would become his wife, with the cold and calculating assurance that they would "suit each other very well." What could be more unromantic and more prosaic?

I am afraid that Lord Mannering's first and foremost sensation was a distinct impression that Lady Cressida had swindled him; and his private reflections upon the subject of his future mother-in-law's character were neither complimentary nor respectful.

But still there was much to puzzle and bewilder him; he could not believe that Ida herself had been a party to the deception—for he could regard it as nothing less—that Lady Cressida had practised upon him. Last night's illness could not have been a sham and a pretence, he had only to look up at her pale face to feel sure of that; there was something that was unexplained to him.

"You have been ill and unhappy, and you have been crying," he said to her. "Tell me what has ailed you."

"I have been very unhappy; and, yes, I have certainly been guilty of a few tears," she answered, and for the first time there was a slight blush upon her face. "But I am going to forget all that now and be quite

happy and cry no more," and she smiled at him affectionately and sweetly.

He felt somehow that it was impossible to question her further. What fault could he find with her? She had accepted him, she had smiled at him quite lovingly, she had told him she meant to be quite happy; she even, at his desire, stretched out her smooth, soft cheek to him, to be kissed in quite a sisterly manner. And yet Lord Mannering felt that she did not love him, and he told himself that had he known as much of Ida Greythorne an hour ago as he did now he would never have asked her to be his wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK'S APPOINTMENT.

THE news of Miss Greythorne's engagement to Lord Mannering soon spread rapidly amongst the scattered inhabitants for many miles on both sides of the valley of the Lennan. From the highest to the lowest, everybody was eager to offer their congratulations upon so propitious an event. Everybody felt that no marriage more suitable and appropriate had ever been arranged.

There was a general rejoicing and hand-shaking over it, and every face was wreathed in smiles and good temper every time that the subject was mentioned; for it was universally felt that Ida—their own young lady—had done a highly creditable and praiseworthy thing in selecting for her future husband, so illustrious a scion of the aristocracy as the Earl of Wilmerton's grandson and heir.

But there was one house where there was no joy and no excitement over Ida Greythorne's engagement.

It was Hester who laid her cool hand upon her brother's brow as he sat moodily by himself in his own room, and told him the fatal news.

"I have been in the village, Dick, and I met Mr. M'Clean"—Mr. M'Clean was the vicar—"he had come down from lunching at the Castle, and he told me—"

Dick looked up sharply.

"Yes—I can guess! She is engaged to Lord Man-

nering. Why do you hesitate, Hester? Have I not expected it?"

"Yes, dear; and it is better to know the worst, and to make up your mind to it, isn't it?" said Hester's compassionate voice.

Dick turned from her with a sort of groan, and hid his face in his hands. Hester stooped and pressed her lips softly upon his dark, clustering curls.

"Are you quite *sure?*" he asked in a low voice.

"Lady Cressida told Mr. M'Clean herself; it is only just settled, I understand; but the news is in everybody's mouth already."

There was a moment or two of silence, then Dick got up suddenly and began putting together the books that lay scattered upon the table before him.

"I am glad I am going," he said brokenly.

"So am I—very glad, Dick, dear," answered Hester, earnestly.

For there had come news to The Cottage that morning which had completely eclipsed, in the minds of the little family, anything that could have been told them from Strathendale.

The morning post had brought Dick's appointment in the Indian Civil Service, and he was to start in a week's time. All was instantly bustle and confusion; Colonel Forrester was delighted and fussy. Mrs. Forrester, half in tears, was tremblingly anxious over her son's outfit, to which, however, she was hardly equal to attend, and Hester felt as if the whole cares of the household were shifted all at once upon her own shoulders. Only Dick remained gloomy and taciturn.

The little sitting-room was already encumbered by

empty trunks, around which heaps of clothes and piles of books and papers were rapidly being collected preparatory to being packed. In the midst of the confusion, poor Mrs. Forrester, sitting on the ground, shed tears between every word she uttered, and seemed utterly incapable of controlling herself. It seemed to her a dreadful fate, this sending off of her boys one after the other to that cruel, distant India, whence she had but small hope of ever living to see them return.

She had borne the departure of the two eldest with a fair amount of fortitude; but Dick was her favorite son, and up to the last she had hoped against hope that something—she hardly knew what—would step in between him and his impending fate.

As Hester, thoughtful and grave, but active and energetic, went to and fro about the house collecting her brother's property, sorting old things from new, and carrying great bundles of clothes in her arms ready to be packed, Mrs. Forrester poured forth her despairing thoughts to her daughter.

"I had hoped it would have been so different Hester; I always thought his going would end in mere talk. There seemed such a much brighter prospect before my boy—so much happiness near home that might have been his!"

"It is better he should go, mamma," said Hester, ignoring allusions, which she, nevertheless, understood perfectly. "You know that you and papa could not afford to keep a grown man at home doing nothing. Dick himself would never have submitted to be a burden upon his parents."

"He need not have been a burden," said Mrs. For-

rester, in a voice broken with tears. "Oh, Hester! how coldly and heartlessly you put things! You know very well, if my dear boy had chosen, he might have had happiness and wealth too. I fear it is owing to your counsels that he has refrained from what a mere child might have seen was within his very grasp. You are much to blame, Hester."

"Oh, mamma! how unjust you are!" murmured the girl, reproachfully. "If you are speaking of Ida, do you suppose if it had been possible—"

"It *was* possible," interrupted her mother, sharply. "It would have been the most natural thing in the world. Ida was brought up with him—"

And then Dick stepped into the room behind her.

"Mother, have you not heard the news?" he said in a cold, deliberate voice. "Miss Greythorne is engaged to Lord Mannering. We have nothing to do with her, nor she with us, forever."

Something in his face silenced his mother. She had never seen her Dick look so stern and harsh. She understood that Ida's name must be spoken no more.

The packing was still going on apace when a groom in the Greythorne livery rode noisily up to the lowly door of The Cottage, bearing a note from her ladyship to Miss Forrester.

She read it through in silence.

"Lady Cressida asks me to go over to Strathendale this afternoon," she said, when she had finished it. "She says that she has something to say to me."

"You will go, I suppose?"

"Yes, mother; I suppose I must, though I do not know what she wants of me."

She sat down to the table to answer the note. Whilst she was writing it Dick came up to her side.

"May I see the note, Hester?"

"Oh, Dick, you had far better not!"

But Dick had already taken possession of it.

"Dear Hester,—Will you come over this afternoon, I have something of importance to say to you. Ida, too, wants to see her old friend. Of course you have heard her great news. The dear child is dying to talk about her happiness and delight to you; so I hope you will come and have some tea.—Yours, C. G."

The note fell from Dick's hands, he turned suddenly and left the room. He went down the slopes of the little garden and sank upon a bench under some spreading beech trees, whence often and often in bygone years he had sat and watched for the flutter of her little white frock.

Was it indeed Ida, his little love, his darling, who had sent such a message to his own sister—a message that she must have known he would hear?

"Her delight and happiness!" he repeated bitterly to himself. "No, there can be no delight to a woman who is false to her own heart, nor happiness, when she is ruining the life of the man who loves her! She cannot be happy! The glitter of rank and position has dazzled her, and the counsels of her mother have drowned the voice of her better self. But no, she *cannot* be happy!"

He remained thus plunged in miserable thought for some time. It did not occur to him to remember his own cruel and almost insulting words to her on the oc-

casion of their last meeting. He did not reflect that a little softness, a little gentleness to her, might have altered both their lives—that the word of love she had yearned for so intensely might have won her even at the eleventh hour. Nor did he see that it was only because he himself had been hard and loveless to her that she had abandoned herself recklessly to her fate.

CHAPTER IX.

HESTER AT STRATHENDALE.

It was late that afternoon when Hester, for the first time since Lord Mannering had been staying at Strathendale, was ushered into the drawing-room at the Castle.

Lady Cressida received her alone. Hester, as in duty bound, murmured some words of congratulation, which she did her best to make as warm and hearty as she could, upon Ida's engagement. Lady Cressida, who, having got everything her own way, was in a state of perfect good temper and serene amiability towards everything and everybody about her, thanked Hester effusively for her good wishes.

"So sure you and your dear father and mother would be pleased! You will all guess what a happiness it is to us to feel that the dear child's future is so satisfactorily settled. Her prospects, indeed, are all sunshine. Lord Mannering is a charming fellow. He will be the best of husbands, and will make her perfectly happy. Oh! yes, my dear, you shall see her presently, of course; but I wanted to say a few words to you first." She took a letter out of her pocket. "I have a letter here from an old friend of mine, Mrs. Tracy. She has an only child, a daughter, whose health has given her a great deal of anxiety for many years, and she writes to me that the doctors have recommended the companion-

ship of some young lady who would be able to live with her constantly. Mrs. Tracy lives in the South. She is a charming person. She would give liberal terms—in short, my dear, I thought that perhaps, as I know you are not very rich, you might be glad to take this opening yourself. Mrs. Tracy asks me if I know any lady who would be suitable, as she does not wish to engage any chance stranger of whom she knows nothing privately. Would you like me to recommend you?"

Hester was silent for some minutes. The suddenness of the proposal startled her. At length she answered slowly,—

"I am deeply sensible of your kindness in thinking of me, Lady Cressida; but I do not think now that there will be any occasion for me to leave home. Indeed I do not see how my mother could get on without me, for I must tell you that Dick leaves us in a week's time. His appointment came this morning."

Lady Cressida's delight at this intelligence was far greater than the commonplace words by which she expressed her polite gratification. To hear that Dick Forrester was going to India so soon was a real relief to her.

"Otherwise," continued Hester, "I might have considered Mrs. Tracy's proposal; but as it is, I do not think I could be spared from home."

Lady Cressida said a few words of civil regret, and put the letter back in her pocket; and then Ida came in from the garden with a basket of roses on her arm.

There was very little of the delight and happiness of which Lady Cressida had spoken in Ida's downcast

face and hesitating manner as she greeted her old friend. There was indeed a deprecating look in her blue eyes cast up to Hester's, and a dumb and almost piteous appeal that Dick's sister should not judge her harshly, that told a very different story from that which Hester had expected. She kissed her affectionately, and murmured to her some commonplace hopes for her happiness.

"You are very kind—very good," said Ida, bending confusedly over her roses.

"This is a happy day for us all," said Lady Cressida; "congratulate your friend, Ida; her brother's appointment has arrived, and he starts for India in a week."

Ida gave one upward look of startled terror into Hester's face.

"Dick!" she faltered, and turned as white as the palest rose in her basket, then, blushing guiltily, bent her head low again over the flowers. If Lady Cressida remarked her daughter's agitation she gave no sign of it. She was knitting some large white woolen wrap on a pair of thick wooden pins. She went on cheerily and placidly with her knitting, and the pins click-clacked merrily against each other.

"Yes, isn't it a good thing? I don't know when I have heard anything that has given me so much pleasure. How glad you must all be, Hester!"

"Yes, we are glad in a way," answered Hester, slowly, still watching Ida's changing color; "but it is sad work parting with him too."

"Of course—of course; but that can't be helped. Young men who have to work for their living must

go out into the world. It is a very good thing for them. Your mother must not fret; she must cheer up, and remember that it is for his advantage."

But Ida never uttered a word. She only sat over her flower-basket, turning the roses over and over with aimless fingers, and staring at them with blinded eyes that saw nothing of what they looked at.

"Ida, are you not going to give Hester some tea?" Ida started, and sprang to her feet, and busied herself, hastily and nervously, over the tea-table. Her mother glanced at her sharply once or twice. "And the sooner that young man is out of the country the better," said Lady Cressida, sagely, to herself. "Well, Ida," aloud, "you are very silent. I thought you would have a host of things to tell Hester."

Thus adjured, Ida found voice to say to her friend,—

"Yes, I should like to talk to you. When you have finished your tea, will you come up-stairs into my room with me?"

Lady Cressida would have preferred that the confidential talk should have taken place in her presence, but she knew not how to object to so reasonable a proposal. So, when the two girls had finished their tea, they rose and left the room together.

CHAPTER X.

A CLUSTER OF NUTS.

The instant they were alone Ida caught hold of her companion's hands.

"*Next week*, did you say? Oh! Hester, can it be really so soon as that that he is going to India?" she exclaimed, with an agitation which she did not even endeavor to conceal.

Hester, if she was surprised, was also a little indignant too. Although she liked Ida personally, she had never considered that she had behaved well to Dick. She had flirted with him according to Hester's ideas. She had deluded him with false hopes because it had been pleasant to her to keep a handsome fellow dangling after her, and then she had thrown him over, without a thought or a regret, when she had no longer need of him.

It was scarcely to be wondered that, believing this, Hester should be somewhat irritated by the great and absorbing interest which Ida, engaged as she was now to another man, displayed in the movements of her brother. She answered her, therefore, coldly and formally,—

"Certainly I said next week. He will probably start on Wednesday or Thursday next. However, that is not what we came here to talk about, was it? You

were to tell me about your engagement, were you not, and about Lord Mannering?"

"Hester, you are cruel to me!" cried Ida, impetuously. "Do you know that Dick and I parted in anger with each other a few days ago? Oh! how can I let him go away to the other side of the world without making my peace with him! Do you think he will come and wish me good-by before he goes?"

"I think he had far better not," said Hester, gravely. "It is better for Dick's peace of mind that he should not see you again. You must see, Ida, that your path and his in life are to lie very far apart from each other. It can do no possible good for him to wish you good-by."

"Hester, dear Hester!" cried Ida, entreatingly. "Pray ask him to come and see me again! Remember the years we have known each other. We have been almost like brother and sister together, have we not? Oh, do be kind to me, and tell him from me I *must* see him once more!"

She twined her arms round Hester's neck, and laid her head caressingly down on her shoulders. No one ever could refuse things to Ida—she had such a pretty and insinuating manner. Hester thought her worse than weak—almost heartless, indeed, to wish to subject Dick to such a trying ordeal. Yet she gave a sort of half promise that she would give him her message.

"I don't think you realize the harm you will be doing to the poor fellow," she said gravely, for she could not understand that this was more than an idle whim on Ida's part to exercise her power over Dick for the last time.

For all her goodness and her wisdom and her three years' seniority Hester was but ill versed in matters of the heart. She had never either loved herself or been beloved. Such things had never come in her way, and she understood but little of love's signs and signals. It did not strike her as possible that Ida Greythorne could love any other man save him to whom she was engaged.

When Ida, at her reiterated request that she would speak of her own affairs, turned from her listlessly and wearily, saying, "Oh! there is nothing to tell you about it—I can't talk about myself," Hester only said to herself, "She is right. If I loved a man I could not chatter about him to everybody; it would be too sacred a subject to be talked over lightly, like a first ball or a new dress;" and she respected her friend for her reticence concerning her lover.

Hester left Strathendale slowly and thoughtfully, but no sooner was she beyond the reach of Ida's pleading face and persuasive words than she began very much to doubt the expediency of fulfilling the promise that had been extracted so unwillingly from her. For her brother's sake Hester deemed that she would do a wise and sensible thing in maintaining a strict silence concerning what Ida and she had talked about.

Where was the use, she reflected, of raking up this miserable business afresh now that Dick was going away and that Ida's engagement had finally put an end to all his hopes? What good could it do him to see her again? Might it not even work positive mischief?

Hester knew that, if left to himself, Dick would go

no more to Strathendale, whereas, if Ida's message was delivered to him, he would certainly fulfil her wishes and go to say good-by to her—a painful and trying ordeal to him, which could only serve to unsettle his mind and to cause him tenfold more grief and pain than he was suffering at present.

So Hester made up her mind—not, indeed, without a few qualms of conscience—that she would hold her tongue and say nothing, and disregard the promise she had given to Ida.

Had she fulfilled it, and had Dick gone to say good-by to Ida at Strathendale, the whole of this history would have been materially altered. Dick would have gone to the Castle in the middle of the day, his visit would have been duly announced by a portly butler and a powdered footman. Lady Cressida would very certainly have been in the room all the time, and Dick's farewell to Ida would have been a very formal business indeed.

But the fates had willed things otherwise, and Hester Forrester, all unconsciously, was preparing the way for a course of events of which she certainly had not the remotest foresight, nor had she the slightest idea of how great were the issues of her well-meant, though injudicious, want of faith to her friend.

She dismissed the subject from her mind, and walked slowly on through the woodland path that led downwards towards the river; the water was now very low, so she had found no difficulty in crossing the Lennan by the stepping-stones, and there was only a shallow, trickling stream amongst the white stones, instead of the torrent which in winter, or in

times of rain and storm, rushed tumultuously down, almost submerging them in its foaming fury.

Hester stepped lightly from stone to stone for she was strong and active, and long custom had made her sure-footed amongst the rocks of the river, by whose banks she had lived ever since her childhood. She went leisurely therefore, and stopped about half-way to bend down and look at the purling water that rippled its way hurriedly across a sweep of many-colored pebbles. Here and there a silver fish flashed swiftly down the stream in the sunlight, or a sudden splash in the deeper pool beyond betrayed the presence of a salmon or a trout.

So absorbed was Hester in watching all this, that she was totally unconscious of the approach of another foot-passenger across the stepping-stones, who was coming towards her from the opposite direction; and it was only when the shadow of a man fell across the sunny water which she was contemplating so earnestly, that she suddenly looked up with a start, and found that upon the very next flat white stone to her stood a gentleman—the same who had so nearly run over her in a dogcart not more than ten days ago.

Hester had not the slightest idea that the man before her was Lord Mannering—Ida Greythorne's betrothed. Of this she was perfectly unconscious; but there was something in the face of this gentleman, who was an utter stranger to her—a way of looking at her that so plainly betrayed his admiration—that she blushed deeply; and in springing aside to allow him to pass by her, somehow her foot stumbled, and, much

to her own shame and confusion, she slipped ankle-deep upon the shining pebbles into the water.

In another instant Lord Mannering, whose feet and legs were encased in strong boots and leather leggings, was beside her.

"What a brute you must think me!" he exclaimed, as he assisted her to regain the stone from which she had fallen. "I seem fated to bring you into trouble whenever I meet you."

"And I seem fated to be everlastingly in your way," said Hester, half laughing. "I really must apologize for my stupidity and awkwardness."

"It was not at all your fault, but mine. I startled you by my sudden appearance. I am quite distressed about you. Your feet are wet. I am afraid you will catch cold."

"Not if I walk home fast. It will not be the first time I have wet my feet in the Lennan."

"I shall certainly walk home with you," said Lord Mannering, giving her his hand to assist her over the stepping-stones.

"Pray do not think of such a thing," she answered.

But she could not avoid taking his hand, although she was vexed with herself for being compelled to accept this attention, which she told herself was totally unnecessary.

"You have not a long walk to The Cottage, fortunately, Miss Forrester," he said, when they had reached the opposite shore in safety.

"How on earth do you know my name!" cried Hester, looking at him in great surprise.

"Have you forgotten that I met you before?" he

replied. "Do you think it likely that, having once met you, I should have omitted to inquire your name?"

He looked at her so fixedly and admiringly whilst he said this that Hester's heart fluttered in a new and unaccustomed manner, whilst her cheeks flushed, and her eyes were unable to meet those of her companion.

"You know I am staying at Strathendale," he continued, walking on by her side.

"Yes, I guessed that," she said, without looking up.

"How is it that ever since I have been there you have never been to the house once?"

"I have been there just now," she answered, smiling, "and you were out."

"I am not sorry for that since I have met you here. Will you forgive me for saying that I am even glad of that unlucky slip into the Lennan, since it has emboldened me to offer you my escort home?"

"Of which I assure you there is not the slightest occasion," she said hurriedly; and then, in order to change the subject, Hester was upon the point of asking him whether he liked Lord Mannering, but something—it was a slight scruple as to whether Ida would like her engagment talked over to another man staying in her house—deterred her from mentioning his name. Instead of doing so, she asked him if he was going to stay at Strathendale much longer.

"A week or so, in all probability," he answered vaguely. And then Hester, blushing rather at her own boldness, said,—

"Will you think me very rude if I ask you to tell me your name? You know mine, therefore I am at a disadvantage; and see, we are at the gate of the

shrubbery, and here I must say good-by to you, and thank you for your kindness, and run home and dry my unlucky feet. If you will not think it odd of me to ask it, tell me what your name is?"

And then Lord Mannering for the space of two or three minutes was silent, not looking at his companion. Curiously enough, he felt totally disinclined to tell his name to this girl. The romance of their meeting—the fascination which she exercised over him, and which he vaguely felt to be reciprocal—the little tacit understanding which, in this second meeting, had been insensibly established between them—all, he felt, would be vanished and swept away in an instant, were Miss Forrester, Ida's friend, to hear that he was Ida's betrothed. Nay, more, would she not, good and true as he had been told she was, be justly indignant at the tone and manner of marked attention and admiration which he knew that he had imparted to the few remarks he had addressed to her. A moment more he dallied with the temptation ere he finally yielded to it.

"Why do you want to know my name?" looking at her with one of those fixed and penetrating glances with which men who have been long accustomed to success with women know how to establish their sway over a heart that is already half subject to them. As they had stood there under a leafy screen of arching trees, whose branches met over their heads, Lord Mannering had idly broken off a spray from the nut bush behind him; there was a little green cluster of nuts upon it, and as he marked how Hester's lovely eyes sank beneath his, and how the rich blood mantled in

her face, with an action half bold, half timid, but altogether caressing, he tapped the little bunch of nuts against her hand, that rested on the top of the garden gate.

"Do you want to know my name that you may think about me sometimes?" he said almost in a whisper, bending down towards her; and then, seeing her silence and all her sweet confusion, his own blood warmed, and his heart beat, and he told himself that he would sooner die than tell her the truth.

He did not think of what might be the consequences of his want of sincerity; nor did it enter into his head to decide how and by what means the delusion he was about to practise upon her was to be kept up. The loneliness and silence of the spot, the soft twitter of the birds above them, the flicker of the sunshine amongst the leaves, the distant hum of the river behind them, and above all the beautiful woman before him, silent and confused, with all the—to him—well-known signs of a dawning love in her downcast face—all this bewildered his senses and turned his head. To speak the truth to her would be to destroy her interest in him and her respect for him forever. It came across him, in self-excuse, that perhaps he might never see her again, in which case the harm done would be small; and the temptation being great, and the consequences sufficiently remote, Lord Mannering yielded to his fate.

"My name is Florian," he said.

"Then good-by, Mr. Florian, for I must go," said Hester, looking up with a smile, holding out her hand.

He took the hand and raised it to his lips; she

snatched it hastily and confusedly away, and fled through the gate ; and with a flush of triumph upon his face, he turned away and strode down the hill out of her sight.

But after he was quite, quite gone, Hester crept softly back again to the shrubbery gate, and, with a guilty but secret sense of delight, she sought for the spray of nuts with which he had playfully tapped her hand. It lay on the ground where he had stood, and she picked it up and carried it home with her, and kept it forever.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD WILMERTON'S GOUT.

In his calmer moments Lord Mannering was inclined to look upon it as a providential thing that, the very next morning after his meeting with Miss Forrester by the Lennan side, he should have received a letter from his grandfather's confidential servant, informing him that the old gentleman had so severe an attact of gout, and seemed so low and out of spirits about himself, that he, Drake, the valet, thought it would be very desirable if his lordship could come to him for a few days

Lord Mannering pondered over this letter for some minutes at breakfast-time, so long, indeed, that Ida playfully recalled his attention to his eggs and ham which were getting cold upon his plate.

"If I stop here I shall be getting myself into a confounded scrape," he said to himself, with his eyes still fixed upon Drake's missive. "I shall behave like a blackguard to one or other of them, and make a miserable man of myself into the bargain." Then he folded up his letter, looked up resolutely at his hostess, and determined to make the worst of the news he had received.

"I am very sorry to say, Lady Cressida, that I shall have to leave you to-day. I have just received news of the severe illness of my grandfather."

Lady Cressida was loud in her expressions of condolence and regret.

"Leave us to-day!" cried Mr. Greythorne; "quite impossible, Mannering! Why, we are to shoot the Stenlock Moors to-day—the best day's sport of the season—you can't play us such a shabby trick as to run away to-day."

Mannering felt much disposed to repent of his newborn virtue when he heard the mention of the Stenlock Moors; but Lady Cressida gave him no time to reply.

"My dear Tom," she said to her husband, "pray don't be so unreasonable as to press him to stay when his grandfather is ill. Sorry as we shall be to lose you, Lord Mannering, I should be the last to urge you to remain away from poor dear old Lord Wilmerton—it is most important that you should go without delay. It is your sacred and Christian duty—and besides, he might alter his will."

Lady Cressida evidently considered this last argument to be quite unanswerable. As to Ida, she said nothing—she only kept her eyes fixed upon her plate, and her color rose a little. Lord Mannering was rather nettled by her silence. After breakfast he went up to her as she stood in the embrasure of the window.

"Are you not sorry that I am obliged to go away?" he asked her.

"Of course I am sorry," she answered, and then looking up into his face with a smile—that smile cost her an effort he never knew of—"but you will come back again as soon as you can?"

"You may be sure I shall," he answered somewhat gravely.

So Lord Mannering departed with his baggage and his valet by the same way that he came—that is to say, by the identical dogcart that had brought him to Strathendale nearly a fortnight ago.

There was no graceful figure in brown holland leaning over the parapet of the bridge as he crossed over the Lennan on this occasion. He noticed the difference with a sigh.

"When I come back again I hope I shall have got over this folly," he said to himself. "If I stayed here and saw her again I should fall in love with that woman! As it is, time and distance and change of scene will bring me to my senses very soon, I daresay. And I trust I may be guilty of no further dereliction from my duty to Ida. After all, there can be no great harm done." And again he sighed. But when his thoughts wandered from his own feelings to Hester's his conscience reproached him sorely. He could not forget the downcast face, the heightened color, and the shy glances of dawning love in those beautiful dark eyes; he could not but know that his own image had probably filled her maiden dreams, and that her first waking thoughts would be, beyond a doubt, of himself!

"I wish I had not deceived her about my name," he said to himself regretfully; "but then, if I had not done so, what a blackguard she would have thought me! And, as it is, I hope she may never see me again to find out the truth. I must arrange, by the way, that the wedding takes place in London, and not here. I can easily persuade Ida that it will please my family more; she is a good little thing, and very fond

of me in a quiet sort of way. She is sure to do what I ask her. And as to standing up here in Lennandale Church and being married, with the knowledge that Hester Forrester was behind my back looking on—why, for very shame I could not do it! No, that is a catastrophe I must at all risks prevent. I could never go through with it."

And here he reached the station, and very soon had left Strathendale with its moors and its rushing river, with all its memories, far behind him.

"I shall forget her now," said Lord Mannering to himself, as the train bore him rapidly southwards. He leaned back in the corner of the carriage, lit his cigar, took out his *Field*, and for the time honestly believed that he had already done so.

Wilmerton Hall stood in a well-wooded park in one of the southern counties. The land was perfectly flat and level; there were plenty of woods, but no hills, and the roads in every direction were remarkably good. The station was a mile from the park gates, and it took you by a good train three minutes under the hour to get up to London. The hunting was fair, the pheasant shooting very good. Altogether, although not a large estate, it was, on the whole, a particularly desirable one, and there were many advantages connected with it of which Lord Wilmerton's heir was not at all unconscious.

The house itself was neither old nor picturesque; in point of fact, it had been built by Lord Wilmerton's father, and having been constructed with a strict regard to internal comfort, and none whatever to external beauty, it was hideous to the last degree. It was a

square white block of stuccoed brick, with a white-washed bell-tower in the center, and as many windows on every side as a manufactory, all which did not in the least prevent its being extremely well arranged and comfortable within.

When Mannering was ushered into his grandfather's room he found the old gentleman propped up with pillows in an armchair, with his gouty foot swathed in cotton-wool and flannel on a leg-rest in front of him.

Needless to say that the Earl was in the worst of tempers. The all-powerful Drake, who was valet, butler, secretary and friend all in one to his lordship, stood behind his master's chair, and handed him, in respectful silence, papers, medicines, food and articles of toilet from a table behind him, where everything he could possibly require was laid out, and from which he made constant and impatient demands for one thing or another every other minute.

There was another occupant of the room—a lady of about fifty years of age—who sat at a little distance from the Earl, between his invalid chair and the window. Of her, however, Florian took no notice on first entering the room. He advanced with outstretched hand to his grandfather's side.

"My dear grandfather, I am truly sorry to find you so ill," he said with concern.

"Dear me, Florian, what on earth brings you home? I thought you were courting up at Strathendale— A clean handkerchief, Drake, with plenty of lavender water—not eau-de-cologne, mind."

"I received a letter from Drake, sir, giving me so poor an account of you, that—"

"And pray what business had you," turning fiercely round to the attendant behind him, "what business had you to write and order his lordship to come home without my knowledge or permission?"

The impenetrable Drake, too much accustomed to such outbursts, and too well experienced in these angry attacks on the part of his master to dream of offering any excuse or apology, maintained so perfect a silence, and so utter an impassiveness of physiognomy, that a stranger might have supposed him to be stone deaf.

"I felt too anxious about you, sir, to remain away," continued Florian. "I thought you would have been glad to see me—that my coming would have been a pleasure to you—"

"Well, well," said the old man, slightly mollified, "and so it is, my dear boy. You find me in a bad way, Florian, in a very bad way. But you haven't spoken to Mrs. Tracy yet; don't you see her?"

Lord Mannering turned round and shook hands with the lady, a fair, fat, soft-looking woman, with a sweet voice and a caressing manner of speaking, rather taking to a stranger, but apt, like the perpetual eating of honeycomb, to cloy and weary after a time by its incessant sweetness.

"I am very glad to see you back, Lord Mannering," she said with a smile of peculiar gentleness. "I have been telling your dear grandfather if he would only be a little more careful about his precious health we should not have the pain of seeing him suffer like this —that dreadful poisonous champagne, for instance."

"You talk a great deal of pernicious nonsense,

ma'am, like all the rest of your sex," cried the Earl, savagely. "Drake, open a bottle of Giesler."

Even Drake was tempted into a murmur of remonstrance.

"Dr. Fulton—my lord—"

"Hold your tongue, you donkey, and do as I tell you. Fill two glasses—tumblers, not those stupid little cockle shells."

Drake filled the tumblers obediently, Mrs. Tracy and Florian looking on in horrified silence. The old man took them both from his servant and handed one of them to Mrs. Tracy.

"Now, madam, drink my grandson's health with me, and congratulate him on his approaching marriage."

"My dear Lord Wilmerton," demurred Mrs. Tracy, flattered, but slightly confused, "at this hour in the morning, and champagne is so bad for your health!"

"Drink the boy's health, madam, and leave mine alone," repeated the Earl, sternly.

Mrs. Tracy looked frightened and began to drink her champagne hurriedly. A smile broke over the old man's not unpleasant countenance. He just raised the glass to his lips, then handed it to his grandson.

"Drink to your own good luck, my boy, and tell Mrs. Tracy to wish you happiness, and health, and plenty of children to carry on the old name."

A sigh of relief broke from Drake; and Florian, laughing at the old man's little childish trick to frighten them all, tossed off the wine.

"You must, indeed, allow me to congratulate you heartily," said Mrs. Tracy, with an appearance of

great and affectionate heartiness. "I hear Lady Cressida's daughter is very nice."

"Charming, ma'am," said Lord Wilmerton.

"And very good-looking?'

"Positively beautiful, Mrs. Tracy; and she is rich and well born, and, better than all, she is strong—yes, *strong*," he repeated meaningly, looking at her with a malicious twinkle in his eye. "Never had a day's illness in her life; rides, walks, dances—healthy exercises—all day. She never lies on her back with a bit of crotchet work, nor messes with doctor's stuff, nor spoils her constitution with pampered idleness. That's the sort of woman to be my grandson's wife."

Mrs. Tracy reddened, although, whether it was owing to the old man's last remark, or to some other allusion best known to herself, it is difficult, perhaps, to say. Florian, too, looked somewhat confused. He hastened to change the subject.

"I thought the corn looking very bad as I came along, sir."

"I am afraid I must be going away," said Mrs. Tracy, rising and shaking out her skirts. "You must come and tell me all about dear Lady Cressida another day, Lord Mannering. You know she and I were at school together, but although we have kept up a correspondence, I have hardly ever seen her since; and I have never seen Miss Greythorne since she was a baby. I shall like to hear about her. Good-by, dear Lord Wilmerton. I do hope you will be a little better to-morrow."

She shook hands with both gentlemen effusively, and took her departure, Drake opening the door for

her, and following her out into the hall to usher her out of the house.

Lord Wilmerton looked laughingly at his grandson.

"There goes the slyest old cat in Great Britain! Did you see her get red, Florian?"

"Upon my word, sir, it was rather a shame. It is all so long ago, one can afford to let bygones alone."

"Pooh—pooh! fair game! Those two women angled for you hard enough. They'd have caught you too, you young idiot, if I hadn't been too many for them!"

"I daresay it was partly my fault," said Florian, a little confusedly.

"Of course it was. You always were an absolute fool about your love affairs! However, that is all over now, I am happy to say; you have made a very wise choice in the end, and I am glad to think all youthful indiscretions of that kind are laid aside forever. No more Persian slaves, eh, my boy? nor penniless, low-born damsels, picked up Heaven knows where? Give me your hand, boy; and I am right glad to see you come to your senses, with a nice wife all ready for you."

Florian took his grandfather's outstretched hand, and returned his cordial grasp; although whether his conscience was altogether at ease during the operation, I leave it to the reader to imagine.

L. of C.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INMATES OF ORCHARD GRANGE.

A ONE-STORIED house, with two red-tiled gables, standing in about three acres of garden, upon the very outskirts of Wilmerton Park, and known by the name of Orchard Grange, was where, many years ago, Mrs. Tracy, then a still youthful widow, had come with her only child to establish herself.

Nobody knew where she came from, nor who or what had been the defunct Tracy, for whose memory the widow wore such coquettish and becoming caps, and at the mention of whose name she invariably raised her fine cambric handkerchief so touchingly to her eyes. Whether he had been rich or poor—whether he had left his widow in affluent circumstances, or whether she struggled bravely to maintain her position, and to keep up a due regard for appearances—these were details upon which the neighborhood had not cared to inform itself.

Truth to say, the neighborhood, being a particularly exclusive one, would have been well content to leave Mrs. Tracy unnoticed and undisturbed in her seclusion, had not the Earl of Wilmerton himself chosen to bestow upon the lady of Orchard Grange the honor of a visit. Soon afterwards Lady Mannering, by her father-in-law's desire, also left her cards upon Mrs. Tracy.

After that the rest of the world, of course, had followed suit, and Mrs. Tracy took her place triumphantly amongst the society of the county.

How this wonderful and unprecedented event took place was best known to Mrs. Tracy herself, but it was generally believed that she had worked upon the Earl's feelings by means of her little girl. The pale, dark-eyed child, then about twelve years old, was always to be seen stretched out upon an invalid chair in the garden, or drawn close up to the open window upon a couch.

Every time Lord Wilmerton went in and out of his lodge gates he could not fail to see the touching picture over the low iron railings which divided the Grange garden from the park—the sick child on the sofa, and the pretty mother bending over her. There was generally a colored shawl over the couch, or a basket of roses at her feet, to add to the artistic effect of the picture.

Sometimes the widow would be singing some plaintive ditty to her daughter, and appear to be so absorbed in her occupation that it was not until the carriage from the Hall had nearly passed through the gates that she would look up with a blush and a start, as though distressed at having been detected in the exercise of her maternal devotion.

This little scene, enacted with slight variations, was almost a daily occurrence; and it was not wonderful that after a time Lord Wilmerton, who was young enough then to take interest in a pretty woman, and kind-hearted enough to feel a warm sympathy for her touchingly-displayed sorrows, should at last

have become deeply impressed by the little domestic picture to be seen every day close to his own lodge gates.

He began to make inquiries concerning Mrs. Tracy, and, naturally enough, he addressed himself to the clergyman, who in duty bound had called upon his new parishioner.

Who was Mrs. Tracy? The Rev. Mr. Blunt could not say; but she seemed an excellent woman, a devoted mother, and had evidently seen much sorrow.

What was the matter with the child? A sad case! A confirmed invalid—either spine complaint or hip disease, Mr. Blunt was not sure which. To the end of all things nobody else was ever quite sure what was the precise nature of Gertrude Tracy's malady.

Mrs. Tracy heard of these conversations between the Vicar and the Earl, and redoubled her efforts. She became more watchful than ever over Gertrude's sick couch. Sometimes, even, as the Hall carriage drove by, the afflicted mother was seen to be weeping; and once the couch was missing from the lawn, and Mrs. Tracy was descried pacing rapidly up and down, alternately wringing her hands despairingly and pressing them wildly to her brow.

On this occasion Lord Wilmerton stopped his carriage at the Rectory to make inquiries.

The child was more ill than usual, he was informed, and confined to bed.

"Is there nothing I can do for her, poor woman?" inquired the compassionate Earl. "If I were to send down some grapes?"

"Indeed, I think it would be a very great kindness,

my lord," answered Mr. Blunt, earnestly, "for she told me this morning that the little girl can be tempted with nothing. She is at her wits' end what to give her; and I don't suppose she has much money to spend in luxuries."

That evening a basket of grapes, with the Earl's compliments and kind inquiries, was brought down to Orchard Grange from the Hall. That was the beginning of good things. The grapes were succeeded by peaches and nectarines; partridges and pheasants followed suit; jelly and daintily-cooked dishes from the Hall kitchen to tempt the appetite of the little invalid; port wine and champagne from my lord's cellar to strengthen her returning convalescence. Whatever was the nature of Gertrude's attack, it is certain that she and her mother fared sumptuously every day during its continuance. At length, however, the child's couch appeared once more upon the lawn; and Mrs. Tracy, interestingly pale, of course, from her nights' watchings and anxieties, but tearfully and modestly grateful, had the supreme delight of receiving the Earl of Wilmerton in her small, prettily-furnished drawing-room, and of thanking him fervently, but not with any undue obsequiousness, for his attentions to her child during her illness.

"It is my belief she would have died without your kindness," she said, turning away her head to hide her falling tears; and Lord Wilmerton pressed her hand, and thought her a very pretty woman indeed.

After that, the Wilmerton carriage stopped very often at the modest doorway of the Grange, so often, indeed, that the neighbors began to prick up their ears

and open their eyes; and it was for some time currently believed that a second Countess of Wilmerton, most unsuitable in every way to the position, would shortly reign at the Hall. Whether or no this was Mrs. Tracy's ambition, and whether, if so, she was ever any way near to the realization of such a scheme, was never accurately known; but just at the time when gossip and scandal were most busy with reports and rumors, and when expectations was on tiptoe as to what would happen next, to the surprise of everybody the Earl suddenly packed up his portmanteaus, shut up the Hall entirely, and went abroad for nearly two years.

When he came back everything was evidently altered. He was still Mrs. Tracy's friend, but he was no longer her devoted adorer. Practical benefits—game, fruits and vegetables—still streamed in constant succession, by his especial orders, from the big house to the little one, but the personal devotion of the sender was wanting, and the barouche stopped but seldom at the Grange doors.

Moreover, Lord Wilmerton had a way of alluding to his relations with the widow, and of sneering at the habits and customs of widows generally, which led those who heard him to suspect that something had opened his eyes to the real character of his neighbor.

Widows were all "sly cats," "deep as pudding," according to him; they were adepts at flattery, and given to shedding "crocodile tears"; and once he was heard to remark that Mrs. Tracy was a very fascinating and clever woman; that he had a sincere regard for her because she always amused him; but that he

had been fortunate enough on one occasion to "find her out."

As to Mrs. Tracy, she was not slow to turn the course of events to her own advantage. She spoke of the Earl constantly as the "dearest, the kindest of friends"; but she never failed to add that his age and eccentricities would prevent any woman still young from regarding him in any other relation. Nor did she fail frequently to hint that she herself might, if she had chosen, have been more than a mere friend to him, but that her own good sense and knowledge of the difference in their positions had prevented her from taking advantage of his proposals.

Years went by, and fresh hopes and ambitions dawned upon the widow's mind. Young Lord Mannering was now rapidly growing up, and he spent most of his vacations, when at home from Oxford, at his grandfather's house.

It was natural that, being of a dreamy and somewhat sentimental turn of mind, and being fond of woman's society, he should often take refuge from the dulness of the Hall in the more genial atmosphere of the Grange.

Gertrude was two years older than himself; she had most of her mother's shrewdness and some of her mother's good looks; she still retained her invalid habits and her supposed delicacy of constitution; and Florian, who was tender-hearted and impressionable, was filled with so much compassion and pity for her, that it appeared to himself to amount to love.

Gertrude was the confidante of his first poetical efforts; to her he addressed endless sonnets and stanzas,

and to her ears alone he poured forth these early and probably unspeakably foolish, compositions. For the whole of one summer vacation Lord Mannering was to be found incessantly by Gertrude's sofa; and Mrs. Tracy, passing occasionally in and out of the room, watched the two heads close together, with all the manuscripts of poems scattered on the table between them, and heard the young man's low voice as he read his verses aloud to his companion, and it is small wonder, perhaps, that her hopes and her fancies ran on ahead, and that she pictured to herself a match for her sickly child such as in her wildest dreams she had never before dared to look forward to. Lord Mannering's extreme youth—he was only twenty—and her daughter's two years of seniority appeared to her as mere trifles; already she looked upon him as her future son-in-law, and told herself that far more wonderful and unexpected things had often taken place.

But her plans were not destined to come to fruition. Lord Wilmerton got wind of what was going on. One morning he came down on foot to the Grange with a brow as black as thunder, and remained closeted for upwards of an hour in the dining-room with the widow.

What took place during that interview even Gertrude never knew. Listening, trembling outside in the passage, she could only tell that many high words and angry recriminations passed between them, and that finally the Earl went away in high dudgeon, stern and angry, whilst her mother was left drowned in tears of rage and mortification.

The belligerents made it up after a time, and became

—outwardly, at least—the best of friends again; but young Lord Mannering came no more to read his poetry at the Grange, and it was many months before he was seen at all again in the neighborhood, whilst Mrs Tracy gave her daughter distinctly to understand that the game was altogether hopeless, and must be abandoned.

All that was long ago. Mrs. Tracy was now fifty years old, and was still fat and fair and good-looking for her years. She smiled and fawned upon her ancient admirer, and was glad enough now to be reckoned amongst his friends, so that she might not lose the trifling presents from his gardens and his larder, of which she could boast with easy superiority to her less-favored neighbors.

"The dear old Earl," she would say, "has sent me such lovely peaches," or "such a handsome present of game! He never forgets me. It is so nice when one's old friends retain all their affectionate regard for one! But he and I have always been such fast friends!"

But Gertrude Tracy neither smiled nor fawned upon any one. She was now nine-and-twenty, although her mother always gave her out to be four years less, and disappointment and a constant indulgence in invalid habits had completely soured and embittered her. Truth to say, the one romance of Gertrude's life—the one softening spot in her existence—the one tender memory in her heart—had been that summer long ago, when Lord Mannering had written poems to her eyes, and had read them out to her in the long sunny afternoons.

As much as it was in Gertrude's power to love any-

body she had loved Florian. He was the one lover who had ever come into her solitary life. Her heart, her vanity and her ambition had been all equally flattered aud carried away by his devotion and attention. When he went away, and she was told that she must give him up and think of him no more, she felt as if she should die of grief and mortification. After a time she recovered from the grief, but the mortification still endured.

She had never recovered from that. All her love had curdled and turned to gall and wormwood within her. The man she had once loved she now hated with a hatred all the more intense because it was carefully and studiously hidden even from her mother's eyes. But if she hated the grandson, still more did she hate the grandfather whose verdict had spoiled her life.

She met him, of course, constantly, and of late years, too, she had often seen Florian again—Florian, who looked upon the romance of her life as a youthful folly to be smiled over—whilst Gertrude dreamed of revenge!

It may be imagined with what feelings Gertrude Tracy heard of Lord Mannering's engagement to Miss Greythorne, and how her busy brain wore itself till it ached with plots and plans to upset the satisfaction of the old man who had injured her, and of the young man who had forsaken her.

When her mother came back from Wilmerton and told her she had seen Lord Mannering, Gertrude's heart stood still for a minute and her pale cheek turned yet a shade paler at the news.

"Home is he?" she said contemptuously. "How

has he managed to tear himself away from his new love?"

"He says he was anxious about Lord Wilmerton's gout," answered her mother, who was taking off her bonnet and gloves, and was slightly flushed after her walk and her unusual potation of champagne.

"As if the old man had never had gout before! It does not look as if he was very keen about Miss Greythorne, does it, mamma?"

"Oh, I believe she is perfect!" said her mother, carelessly.

"Did Florian ask after me?" inquired Gertrude, after a minute.

"He never even mentioned your name! My dear child, you surely don't care after all these years?"

"I care? certainly not!" Gertrude answered sharply. And then she was silent for some time.

She rested her thin, white face upon her hand, and looked away out of the window immovably for many minutes. She was pondering deeply.

CHAPTER XIII.

IDA'S DESPAIR.

After her lover had gone away from Strathendale, Ida Greythorne experienced a sense of such unmistakable relief, that she was quite astonished and bewildered at herself.

"What can be the matter with me?" she said to herself, half in alarm at her own sensations. "Surely it cannot be natural that I should be glad that Mannering is gone, merely because I want to see Dick Forrester again!" for Ida could not—or possibly she would not—give the right name to her feelings.

She knew that she was bitterly miserable about Dick, but she assured herself also that, having had an unlucky quarrel with her old playfellow, it was only natural that she should be unhappy at the idea of his going away for so many years without making it up with him before he started. No wonder that her thoughts were more filled with this just now than with anything else. Could one put all one's old friends completely out of one's head, and take no more interest in them and their doings just because one happened to be engaged to be married to a person who six months ago was an utter stranger? Such a thing, Ida told herself, was clearly impossible! But although she was thus ignorant of the very alphabet of love, she shrank with a vague

feeling of uneasiness from analyzing too minutely that curious sensation of light-heartedness that came upon her as she stood watching the retreating dogcart down the avenue that was bearing her betrothed away out of her sight.

Now, she thought, as she went back into the house, now Dick would come and see her, and wish her good-by.

It never occurred to her to doubt for one instant that Hester had delivered her message to her brother, and having received it, of course he would come. When had not Dick flown to do her bidding at all times? She had been always a queen to him, and he the very humblest and most obedient of her slaves.

So she waited in perfect confidence, refusing to leave the house for fear he should come in her absence, and determining to be at home when he should pay his expected visit.

Almost directly after Lord Mannering's departure, the weather, that had been unusually fine for some time, suddenly broke; torrents of rain and gales of wind succeeded each other day after day; the moors were shrouded in mist; the Lennan rushed wildly and angrily between its boulders, and whole gusts of yellow leaves came whirling down from the woods in every direction.

About the same time the party staying at the Castle dispersed—the gentlemen went on to fulfil other shooting engagements, and the ladies to pay other visits, so that one by one having departed, the family trio was finally left alone in the house. Days went by, and still Dick did not come. Ida began to

feel very uneasy and anxious about him; then she grew indignant and angry, and told herself he was harsh and ill-mannered, and not worthy of the interest she took in him. That lasted for two days, during which she felt far too proud to write to him, and too deeply hurt by his neglect of her to make any effort to go to The Cottage herself. But when a woman really loves, as Ida all unconsciously did, pride is of very little permanent help to her in her troubles. When the Monday came, and brought with it no sign of Dick, and Ida reflected that he was to leave at seven o'clock on the Wednesday morning, Ida laid aside her pride and her indignation, and determined that she would make an effort to go to The Cottage on Monday.

At luncheon time she ordered her pony-carriage to be brought round.

"Going out driving, my dear?" said her father in surprise; "why, it is raining hard, and blowing a perfect gale!"

"I can't help it, papa; I have been in four whole days. I shall be ill if I don't get a little fresh air. I shall put on a waterproof cloak; the rain is nothing much—it won't hurt me."

"I think, dear child," said her mother, "that I will go with you. I, too, feel quite ill from being confined to the house for so many days; I think, as you say, that a breath of fresh air will do us both good."

Whether Lady Cressida had or had not any ulterior object in thus volunteering to accompany her daughter, I will leave it to the intelligent reader to divine. Certain it is, that had any one taken the trouble to remark the fact, they might have noticed that her

ladyship had never lost sight of her child for twenty consecutive minutes since Lord Mannering's departure.

It was impossible for Ida to decline her mother's society; there was nothing for her to do but to smile and looked pleased, and to say how happy she should be to take her out in her pony-carriage.

The two ladies, wrapped up in cloaks and rugs started duly from the door after lunch, in a fine drizzling mist, that made Mr. Greythorne laughingly remark as he watched them depart from the hall door, that they had certainly chosen a singular method of "going a-pleasuring."

"I thought of going round by The Cottage," said Ida as unconcernedly as she could, though her heart beat a little as she said the words.

"Dear me! we had much better go along the upper road, my dear; it will be so much easier to turn back if it comes on worse; and getting in and out, if they are at home, will be such a nuisance in the rain."

"I haven't seen Hester for nearly a week—I want to ask her if she has finished copying the song I lent her; I really want it back."

And without more ado she turned her ponies' heads along the lower road that led to the bridge over the Lennan.

Lady Cressida felt that no good could be got by disputing the point. She submitted to be taken to The Cottage, reflecting that even if its inmates were at home, not much harm could be done under her own keen and watchful eyes.

The pretty little carriage, with the two smart ponies

that stepped so daintily up to their noses, pursued its way down the very heavy and muddy lane to the bridge, and then turned short round on the opposite bank and began slowly to climb the rather steep and weary hill that led to The Cottage.

The groom rang the bell at the modest porch and the maid answered the door. Oh, how Ida's heart beat!

"Is Mrs. Forrester in?" inquired Lady Cressida, already fingering her card case.

"No, my lady; the Colonel and Mrs. Forrester are both out walking," replied the maid.

"And Miss Forrester?" inquired Ida, hastily.

"She has just gone out too, miss, into the village."

"Dear me, what a pity!" said Lady Cressida, airily and unconcernedly, and proceeded to deal out a whole sheaf of cards into the footman's hand.

Then Ida grew desperate.

"Oh, mamma, do ask if Dick is in!" she said under her breath.

"My dear!" exclaimed Lady Cressida, with a horrified dismay in her face and voice, as though she could not rightly believe her ears, "inquire for a *young man!*—such a thing is *never* done!"

"But, mamma, he is going to India. I should so like to see him again!" pleaded Ida, despairingly and recklessly.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life, Ida. You must have taken leave of your senses. Pray drive on immediately," said Lady Cressida, coldly and sternly.

But Ida stretched out across her mother and called out to the maid,—

"When does Mr. Dick leave, Mary?"

"On Wednesday, miss, at seven o'clock in the morning."

She had no further excuse for lingering. The groom, at a sign from Lady Cressida, jumped up behind, and she was perforce obliged to drive on.

The next day—the last of Dick's stay in his home—Ida felt pretty well distracted. At one moment she told herself that Dick was *certain* to come—that he had only put off his visit to her until the last, and that it was quite impossible that he could go away without seeing her once more; at another moment she wept and wailed and wrung her hands distractedly, moaning aloud that she would see him no more, that he hated and loathed her, and would go away forever without a word of farewell and forgiveness.

The day wore away—stormy, rainy, and blowy, like its predecessors. Ida made no effort to go out to-day; she only stood despairingly at the drawing-room window, doing literally nothing, only pressing her hot hands together and gazing across at The Cottage gables half hidden in the woods, with an amount of utter wretchedness and misery in her face which she did not even care to conceal.

Lady Cressida, watching her with her sharp, shrewd eyes, saw it all with a little smile that was not altogether unfeeling.

"She will be all right in twenty-four hours," she said to herself; "poor child, I daresay she feels as if it would kill her. I remember when I was seventeen feeling much the same about that knock-kneed curate with the stammer, when my dear mother so wisely

sent me away from home. I soon got over it and felt thankful to her for saving me from my own folly, and so will Ida, poor child, very soon. Thank goodness, that young man goes to-morrow. In a week's time Mannering probably will be back again, and that will divert her thoughts and put her all right. Poor little girl, I am sorry for her just now, though. But girls' hearts are very elastic, fortunately, and not easily broken."

Thus Lady Cressida consoled herself. But there was no consolation for Ida! Ida only felt as if she should die! Lord Mannering—her engagement—her position as Miss Greythorne of Strathendale—the fact, even, that Dick had never asked for any love and affection at her hands—all was forgotten! She only knew that Dick—her own Dick—was going away, and that if she could not wish him God-speed on his distant travels it would kill her!

She half expected, with the wild impatience of the young under suffering that seems to them unbearable, that something unprecedented would happen—some great event take place—some wonderful convulsion of life be suddenly made in her favor to save her from the realization of her pain. But there was no miracle worked upon her behalf.

Only the afternoon wore itself away. The daylight faded, twilight wrapped the stormy world without in its gray and misty shroud; the footman came in to draw the curtains and to light the candles. The dressing-bell rang, and she was obliged to go and array herself in her pretty blue and white gossamer dress, with its blue ribbons and white laces; and then to

sit between her father and mother all through the long solemnity of dinner, with its six courses, in their tedious, and interminable length. But she could not talk; she felt too sick and ill at heart either to eat or to speak.

"What is the matter, Ida?" asked her father more than once. "You have not spoken a word, and you have eaten nothing."

"I think Ida has a headache," interposed her mother, with the kindly wish to save her from the pain of answering.

"What! pining for your lover, pussy?" said her father, playfully.

Ida winced, and grew red all over her white, wan face. But she was too utterably miserable to feel for more than one minute the shame which her father's chance remark had called forth.

After dinner it was her mother who, kissing her kindly, said to her,—

"I think, dearest, you had better go to bed. Your head seems aching frightfully, and I am sure you don't look fit to sit up."

And the girl went away to her own room, grateful to be released.

But not to bed. She only flung her window wide open, and sat there staring wildly and miserably into the dark and stormy night. Away across the valley, all through the mist of rain which swept over the land, she could see lights in The Cottage windows. She knew them all, every one—the drawing-room, and Mrs. Forrester's bedroom above, and Dick's own little den on the ground floor, where he always sat up every night read-

ing or writing. Ida knew them all, and could picture to herself the occupations of the whole family in each of the rooms that was lighted up—the mother and Hester finishing off the packing upstairs, Colonel Forrester reading or writing in the drawing-room, and Dick in his own little den.

Ah! what was he doing! Thinking of her probably, perhaps as miserably and despairingly as she was of him! The picture of his loneliness and wretchedness was so plainly in her mind, that Ida almost felt as if she could actually see him.

She watched at the window for a long, long time. Then, one by one, first the lights in the drawing-room and then those in the bedroom were extinguished; but the candle in Dick's room on the ground floor still burned on brightly and steadily. He had evidently no intention of going to bed yet.

Meanwhile the inmates of the Castle itself had retired to rest. Ida heard her father and mother come upstairs to their rooms, the footsteps of her lady's-maid along the passage, and then the gradual dying away of all sounds into absolute silence.

Dick's candle still burned like a beacon-light across the valley.

Suddenly there darted into Ida's mind a suggestion so wild and so startling that it positively took away her breath.

At first she repelled the terrifying thought.

"It is impossible!" she said aloud, terror-stricken and trembling.

But the thought came again and again with such persistence that the vague idea became a resolution,

and the resolution strengthened itself rapidly into absolute action.

Hurriedly she wrapped herself in a long waterproof ulster that buttoned down to her feet; enveloped her head closely in a thick, soft north-country plaid; exchanged her thin shoes for a pair of thick country boots; and slipping hastily downstairs, crept out of the silent house by a small window of the conservatory that was usually left unfastened, and in two minutes more she stood alone in the darkness of the stormy night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LENNAN STEPPING-STONES.

A WILD, wet night! The wind blew, and the rain came down in a cold, unceasing mist, and the Lennan roared and foamed, angry and surly, between its rocky banks.

The stepping-stones were all submerged—not deeply so, for the rainfall at so early a period of the autumn was seldom sufficient to render them actually impassable—but over each hidden white stone there swept a swift current of six or eight inches of water, that swirled away over them, and tossed itself beyond in a sheet of snowy eddies, gleaming weirdly and whitely out of the darkness.

All day long the country people, bare-legged, and armed with long poles, had splashed and floundered backwards and forwards across them; but it was a very different matter for a delicately-nurtured girl, thinly clad and shod, to cross them in the black darkness of the stormy night.

In after days Ida often marveled to herself how she had ever accomplished that difficult and dangerous passage; she wondered how she could possibly have done it. Nothing but the devotion of a despairing love could ever have endowed her with strength and courage enough for the enterprise. She had, it is true, taken a

stout walking-stick of her father's with her, but in her haste, although she had slipped off her evening-dress and put on a dark serge skirt in its place, she had forgotten to change her white petticoat or her delicate silk stockings. In half a minute these were naturally enough saturated with water and mud; the fine lace and embroidery of her dainty skirt was drabbled and torn, and before she had taken half a dozen steps through the stormy waters she was simply wet through up to her knees. She soon found it almost impossible to keep her footing upon the stepping-stones. The darkness, the deafening swirl of the water in her ears, the blinding mist of rain that drove into her face, the wind that almost blew her down, and the current that in its strength well-nigh swept her off her feet—all combined to render her passage not only extremely slow, but also excessively dangerous. Had Ida not been born and bred within the sound of Lennan waters she never would have reached the opposite shore alive that night. A stranger must infallibly have perished; but there were one or two things which gave her confidence, and which enabled her to pursue her way safely.

One was the intimate knowledge that she possessed of the river. She knew that if she only kept close above the stepping-stones, even if she was unable to keep upon them, she could not possibly be drowned, because the river here was at its shallowest. There were deep, dangerous holes further down, and rough, broken waters where she would surely perish were she to be swept into them; but so long as she could keep her footing upon or close to the stones, she knew that, although she might get wet through, she could not by

any means be drowned. The only thing she had to do was to prevent being swept off her feet by the violence of the current. To insure this, Ida recollected the instructions which years ago Dick had given her in her childhood, when, once belated on the farther side, he had helped her across the swollen river at a time when it was in nearly as bad a state as now. He had told her then to wade upon the bed of the river—not *below*, but *above* the stepping-stones. In this manner, though she might be thrown down by the violence of the water, she could never be swept down the stream, for by clinging on to the stones themselves she would easily be enabled to regain her footing. Ida, with an amount of coolness and presence of mind which one would hardly have given her credit for, remembered and acted upon this recollection now in the hour of danger.

And so somehow, faint and weary, and wet to the skin, she at length accomplished her object, and reached the opposite shore of the river, and sinking down utterly exhausted upon the grassy bank, she remained for some minutes perfectly incapable of moving any farther on her way.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of what the woman he loved was going through in order to see his face once more, Dick Forrester sat alone in his little room by the light of his one candle that had gleamed so brightly and alluringly across the valley that divided them from each other. He was sitting up writing to her. It was a letter of eternal farewell—a letter in which all the love and the bitterness, and the despair of his life were concentrated. He opened his heart to her, laying bare all its tenderness and passion, and all its

misery and anguish. It was like the letter of a dying man. He believed he should never see her again, and he wanted to tell her, ere he left her, all the story of his hopeless love.

He wrote and wrote—line after line fell from his rapid pen—page after page lay wet with ink upon the table before him. In all his life he had written no such letter—he would never write such a letter again.

But before it was finished—before the last words of his despair and wretchedness were inscribed upon the page before him—all at once Dick Forrester's life was altered for him forever.

Suddenly he looked up, as if by some irresistible instinct, and beheld, from the darkness without, a face, white and wet and grief-stricken, pressed against the window pane without.

In the first moment of terror and of amazement, it seemed to him that she must be dead, and that it was her spirit that had come to visit him. And then, with a wild rush of bewildered hope that set his heart beating, and his pulses ringing with a new and nameless sensation, he flew to the window and flung it open. Out of the darkness and the storm, and the driving rain without, she made one step into the room, then sank down half fainting at his feet in her dripping cloak; the plaid that was wrapped round her head fell back from her shoulders, and all her wet golden hair streamed wild and disordered about her lovely face.

She could not speak, she could not even look at him; she could only clasp her hands against her wet cheek, and lie there all in a heap on the floor at his feet.

"*Ida!* great heavens!" he exclaimed, breathless

and frightened, yet with that wild, tumultuous joy at his heart such as comes but seldom to men in their lives, "how did you get here? What has brought you, my child? You are wet to the skin!"

"I crossed the river!" she said with a gasp.

"The river! Good heavens! such a night as this! What made you do it?"

"You wouldn't come. I had never wished you good-by. How could I let you go without seeing you?"

And then her head fell back and she fainted.

Dick flew into the adjoining dining-room and fetched some wine in trembling haste from the sideboard. He lifted her on to the sofa, and as she revived a little made her drink what he had poured out for her, and then took her wet plaid and cloak from her shoulders.

"What am I to do with you?" he exclaimed in great distress. "You are literally wet through! I must call my mother."

"No—no; for heaven's sake!" gasped Ida, breathlessly. "I am better now. I was only a little faint. Dick, I should die of shame if any one knew I had been here. Besides, I must go back almost directly. I dare not stay; I might be missed. I never catch cold; it won't hurt me to be wet."

"As if I should let you go back alone across the Lennan! It is a miracle you were not drowned on such a night. Oh! Ida, my own darling, is it indeed for me—for your poor Dick, who loves you so devotedly—that you have done this wonderful thing?"

And then he sank at her feet and pressed her hands wildly and passionately to his lips.

"I must go—I must go!" cried Ida, awakening,

perhaps for the first time, to a sense of the position to which her desperate and impulsive action had brought her. "I only meant to say good-by, and to wish you every happiness, dear, dearest Dick, and to make up our last quarrel before you went away forever. Oh! Dick, please—please don't kiss me like that. I am afraid I have done very wrong. Please let me go now."

For Dick had not remained satisfied with kissing her hands. He had seated himself now upon the sofa by her side, and had drawn the lovely head, all dripping and wet as it was, closely down upon his bosom, and was showering down hot kisses upon her burning cheeks.

"As if I should let you go and leave me now!" exclaimed Dick, triumphantly—"now that I know that you love me, my own darling."

"Oh, Dick"—struggling, but not very effectually, to free herself from his encircling arms—"what do you mean? Indeed—indeed, you must not say such things. You know I am engaged to Lord Mannering. I only meant to say good-by to you. You must not kiss me, indeed you must not—not like *that* at least. Lord Mannering—"

"Look here, Ida," interrupted Dick, taking her face between his two hands and lifting it up so that he forced her to look into his eyes, "do not let there be any more sham or pretence between you and me. You may be engaged to Lord Mannering, but you do not love him, and you do love me."

"Oh, Dick," she faltered, lowering her eyes beneath the fire of his.

"You know that what I say is true. Do you suppose that after this night I will believe that you care for any other man on earth but me? And no, don't try to turn your head away, because I am not going to let you. Look at me in the face if you can, and tell me that you would have done this—what you have done for me—just to see me again, for any man on earth whom you did not love with your whole heart and soul? Ida, you know you love me. No power in heaven and earth shall ever make me believe now that you don't. And if you love me, then I mean to win you. From this hour, Ida, Lord Mannering is to be nothing more to you! You are going to give him up for me."

"Oh, Dick, I dare not—indeed I dare not; think of mamma! she will never hear of it. Indeed it is better that you should forget me; I should never dare to break my engagement."

"Oh, yes, Ida, you will; a woman who can wade through the Lennan on a night like this, for the sake of the man she loves, can dare anything; and before you leave this room you are going to promise me—"

But Ida, whose face was towards the door, suddenly uttered a cry of dismay, and wrenched herself away from Dick's arms. Turning round he beheld his mother arrayed in her night-gown and dressing-gown, flat candlestick in hand, standing speechless in the doorway.

"I heard voices—I came to see what it was. Good Heavens, Dick, who is with you?"

"Come in, mother, it is only Ida," said Dick, rising awkwardly enough from Ida's side. But Ida buried her face, crimson with shame, amongst the sofa cushions.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW IDA SLEPT AT THE COTTAGE.

When Mrs. Forrester began rightly to understand from Ida's incoherent and tearful words, and from Dick's half-shamefaced and half-triumphant explanations, that the heiress of Greythorne had actually walked across the Lennan in such weather at half-past ten o'clock at night, she was neither indignant nor angry, as poor Ida expected her to be, but was, on the contrary, filled with a great tenderness of heart towards the girl who had ventured upon so brave and desperate a deed for the sake of her darling son.

It seemed to her that Ida had behaved nobly in thus setting at nought all considerations of prudence and of worldly wisdom, in order to show thus plainly her affection and her preference for one who, surely in the mother's eyes, was worthy of the best and richest woman in the land. Mrs. Forrester did not at all wonder that any girl should be capable of losing her head as well as her heart for handsome Dick. The only wonder to her was that any one could have hesitated for one instant in preferring him to every other man alive.

But whilst these thoughts rushed through her brain, others of a more practical nature impelled her into in-

stant and most motherly attentions. She was truly distressed and horrified by Ida's wet and shivering condition.

"You must come upstairs with me instantly, my dear, and be thoroughly warmed and dried, and got to bed, and I will prepare you something hot to take or else we shall have you laid up with rheumatic fever. Come, we must not lose a moment, you dear, imprudent, impulsive child!"

"Oh, but, Mrs. Forrester, indeed I must not stay. I must get home or mamma will find out I have been here; indeed—indeed I must go back!"

"Go back! Are you mad, Ida? As if I should allow you to go back in the way you came on such a night! It is absolutely impossible; you must stop here until the morning."

"Oh, Mrs. Forrester," cried Ida beginning for the first time to realize all the consequences of her escapade, "for Heaven's sake don't keep me. I will walk round by the bridge if you like, but go I must. I had rather be laid up for weeks than that mamma and papa should find out what I have done."

"Come, Ida, don't be foolish, my dear. You know very well that sooner or later your parents must know it. You will have to brave their anger for Dick's sake, you know; but to such a courageous, noble girl, as you have shown yourself to be, this, I am sure, will be no permanent obstacle. Oh! my dear child, how wise you have been to free yourself from a life of misery, and to follow the dictates of your own true and honest heart."

Poor Ida wrung her hands in despair. Why

would they both persist in assuming that this nocturnal visit to Dick was tantamount to breaking off her engagement to Lord Mannering, and to engaging herself to Dick Forrester? Both mother and son seemed to take it for granted that such was her intention, whereas no such thought had entered her head.

"Indeed, indeed," she cried pitifully, "you are mistaken—I don't mean that; I only wanted to say good-by to Dick before he went, and to be quite sure we were parting friends; and now I have said good-by, and that is all I meant—oh, pray let me go home!"

She stood up; but partly from mental agitation, and partly from the cold of her wet garments—which began to strike a chill into her—she shivered and trembled to such an extent, that she was forced to acknowledge herself utterly incapable of getting back to Strathendale; she was therefore obliged to submit herself to Mrs. Forrester's maternal ministrations—Mrs. Forrester, who only smiled provokingly at her attempts at repudiating the position in which she would persist in placing her, kissing her with a calm, placid superiority of manner, as though to say, "we won't argue about it to-night, because you are tired, but of course it is as clear as daylight that you intend to be Dick's wife."

Very early the next morning, before it was well light, there came a loud rapping at the door of the marital chamber wherein Mr. Greythorne and Lady Cressida slept the calm slumber of peaceful and untroubled middle-age.

The rapping was so loud and so incessant, that finally her ladyship, turning over among her warm

pillows, awoke, not in the very best of tempers, to the consciousness that something must have happened.

"Good gracious! what is the matter!" she exclaimed angrily. "Come in, whoever you are; and what on earth do you want at this hour in the morning?"

A shivering and half-clad housemaid entered in the dim morning light, bearing a letter in her hand.

"Oh, my lady, I'm sure I beg pardon for disturbing you, but the man as brought this would take no denial; he said that it was very important you should have it immediate; and he knocked Thomas up, and I was just beginning to dress, so I thought I should bring it quicker that any one."

"There, there, hold your tongue, and draw up the blinds," interrupted Lady Cressida, sitting up in bed. "Where did you say it came from?"

"From Mrs. Forrester, at The Cottage, my lady."

"Most impertinent!" muttered her ladyship, frowning as she broke the seal of the letter.

The blinds being now drawn up, she was just able to decipher the writing.

She had not the remotest idea that the letter she held in her hand could in any way concern herself. It had only flashed rapidly through her mind that somebody at the Forresters' must be ill or dead, and that Mrs. Forrester had written her for help or assistance of some kind.

Mr. Greythorne, who was also awake by this time, watched her open the letter with perfect unconcern. He thought, of course, that it was tiresome and inconsiderate of "The Cottage people," whatever might be

their trouble, to disturb their neighbors at such an early hour in the morning; but being more good-natured than his wife, he was quite prepared to get up instantly, and do his best to render them any assistance in his power so soon as he should hear what they wanted.

"I suppose somebody is ill, and they want to borrow a horse and man to send for the doctor. Of course we can do that for them, if they are in trouble, poor things! But they might have waited half an hour, till one was awake, to send over."

But he was quite unprepared for the cry of dismay and horror that broke from his wife's lips as she ran her eye over the letter.

"Good Heavens, my dear, what is the matter?"

But Lady Cressida was incapable of speech. She only thrust the note into her husband's hands, and, springing out of bed, rushed to the bell-rope, in order to summon her maid and hot water, preparatory to getting dressed as quickly as possible.

The letter from Mrs. Forrester was as follows:

"Dear Lady Cressida,—I send over as early as I possibly can, in order that you may not be alarmed on account of Ida, if you should discover that she is not at home. She came over to us yesterday evening, and was so thoroughly wet through, that, as we have no carriage in which I could send her back, I am sure you will say I did rightly in keeping her here for the night. She is in bed in Hester's room; and although I do not think there seems anything serious the matter, still, as she is a little feverish, it would perhaps be more satis-

factory if you were to send for Dr. Scott, just to see that she has not taken any harm. I hope, of course, that you will come over yourself as soon as possible, as I think it will be better to keep her in bed till the middle of the day in any case. I hope you will be indulgent to the dear girl, and not scold her too much for her folly and imprudence in venturing out on such a wet evening.—Yours sincerely,

MARY FORRESTER."

"What on earth does it mean?" exclaimed Mr. Greythorne, sitting up in bed and scratching his gray head in a bewildered manner "Ida at the Forresters'! How did she get there? When did she go? Surely she dined with us last night, or am I dreaming?"

"Yes, she dined with us, of course, and went to her own room after dinner. She must have gone out then, after we imagined she was in bed. Poor deluded, misguided girl! What on earth is to become of her!"

"It wasn't a night fit for a dog to be out! I trust and hope she has not taken any serious harm. Sometimes a feverish cold is a dangerous thing."

"Oh, what do I care for that!" cried Lady Cressida, distractedly; "her health is nothing; if she is ill it will only be a well-deserved punishment. It is her reputation I am thinking about."

"Her reputation!" repeated her husband, horror-stricken. "My dear, what can you mean; surely the Forresters—most respectable people—"

"I wish every single one of the Forresters could be drowned in the Lennan!" cried her ladyship, savagely.

She had dismissed her maid, and was huddling on her garments as quickly as she could.

"Don't you see the scandal there will be?" she continued distractedly. "Of course she went to see that wretched young man; that is what comes of allowing one's children to associate with those below one in station! I always disapproved of that intimacy—you know I did."

"But, my dear Cressida, surely you are making a very terrible accusation against our daughter! Is she not engaged to be married, with our consent and approval, to a most excellent and charming young fellow? Is it likely that she would be so lost to all feeling of duty and honor to him, as well as to all sense of maidenly modesty, as to go out at night after another man? I cannot believe it of her—her affection for Lord Mannering—"

"I am sure I know nothing of her affection to him," cried Lady Cressida, who understood more of her daughter's secrets than did her father, "pray don't talk of it any more; I feel as if I should go mad; and for the sake of appearances I must get there as quickly as possible. You had better get up yourself, Tom, and order the brougham for me directly. I shall bring her home at once. And as to sending for Dr. Scott, and making a talk all over the county, Mrs. Forrester must take me for a perfect fool to imagine I should do such a thing! It is bad enough, goodness knows, as it is!"

An hour later, Lady Cressida, stern and angry, stood by her daughter's bedside.

"Get up at once, you unhappy and wicked girl," she said to her trembling child. And Ida, weak and ill,

and terrified, obeyed as best she knew how. Not one word, save of formal and coldly polite thanks to Mrs. Forrester, did Lady Cressida address to the inmates of The Cottage, as she carried away her daughter rolled up in shawls and blankets from its doors, inwardly vowing to herself that Ida should never again cross its offending threshold.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPIRITED AWAY.

Dick had not been at home when Lady Cressida carried Ida off in so summary a manner. Very early in the morning he had started off stealthily by himself, and had walked to the nearest telegraph station, four miles off, whence he had despatched a telegram to London.

When he returned Lady Cressida had come and gone, carrying away Ida with her in the brougham.

Hester met him in the hall.

"Oh, Dick, I am so thankful you have come in! I could not think what had happened to you. You have very little time for your breakfast, dear, and two of your boxes are still unfastened. Is there anything more to go into them? The fly will be here in a few minutes."

"When it comes you can send it away again," said Dick, flinging down his hat on the hall table; "I am not going."

"Not going! But how can you put it off, Dick? Surely the ships starts—"

"What does it signify about the ship, Hester? Don't you understand that I am not going to India at all? I have telegraphed to resign my appointment."

Not one word did Hester speak, only she turned cold and sick with dismay. Too well she knew how

severely this rash and impulsive action would press upon the already straitened circumstances of the little family; too well she remembered all the home-pinching and striving to make two ends meet, in order that Dick's expensive education might be carried forward —the education that had resulted in this long-hoped-for appointment, which he now was madly flinging away.

To Hester the events of the night opened no prospect save of trouble and misfortune. Mrs. Forrester might rejoice over Ida's daring and spirit, and consider the wealthy heiress as good as married to her favorite son; but Hester knew that these exultant and triumphant hopes were built upon a very shallow and shifting foundation. She understood Ida better than any of them; and while she appreciated all the sweetness of character, and all the charm of manner which rendered her so winning and so lovable, she knew her to be quite wanting in the strength and determination of will which would enable her to withstand the home-authority and home-persecution to which, once removed from Dick's influence, she would be sure to be subjected. Ida would never have the needful dogged perseverance to stick to Dick, nor would she ever dare to face the scandal and the gossip which, to give up a marriage with Lord Mannering for the sake of a poor, unknown man, would entail upon her. Hester knew all this perfectly. And now Dick had thrown over his chances in life, and had cast himself again, a penniless, helpless burden, upon his parents' hands! She turned from him, cold and heart-sick, with a weary sense of failure and misfortune.

"Don't look so shocked, Hester," said Dick, catching hold of her hand. "Is it likely that can I go away out of the country *now?* You must see that my prospects are very different from what they were twenty-four hours ago."

"I had rather not discuss it, Dick, we should never agree ; only I know that you have flung away a substantial good in order to run after a shadow."

"Pooh ! Of course there will be difficulties, but we shall overcome them all. Ida—"

"Ida will *never* break her engagement for you, Dick."

"You make me quite angry. You were always hard on her ; you never give her credit for anything good ; you shall hear what she says herself."

"I have no chance of doing that, Dick ; she is al ready gone."

It was Dick's turn to turn pale and to look dismayed.

"*Gone!*" he repeated blankly.

"Yes; Lady Cressida came and carried her away a quarter of an hour before you came in."

"And she went—without a struggle, without an effort to see me again ? "

"My poor Dick, why do you not learn to face the truth ? Ida is like wax in her mother's hands ; she does not know how to defy her or to withstand her authority."

But Dick turned upon her angrily.

"You do not understand her in the very least. Do you suppose a woman who did what she has done for my sake will be frightened by a few angry words from

an old woman? I suppose she thought it wiser to go away quietly with her mother this morning, but I know quite well that she means to stick to me through thick and thin; and as to my prospects, don't be downhearted, Hester. I could not have gone to India and have left her now, with everything unsettled as it is—that, indeed, would have been to court failure—but I have no doubt I shall get something to do in London. I shall go to town very shortly and see; I will not remain to be a burden upon my father."

"I hope you may, but it is not so easy to get employment in England," said Hester, sadly.

And then Dick, sorry that he had spoken harshly to her, drew her to him and kissed her.

"Now, like a dear, good girl, would you mind going to the governor and telling him? I know you will break it to him better than I shall."

So, with masculine selfishness, Dick shifted the unpleasantness of his life upon his sister's devoted shoulders, and went off himself, sanguine and buoyant of spirit, to receive the sympathy and the flattering adulation of the fond mother, who was sure to look at all his troubles through rose-colored spectacles, and to believe that nothing but what was good and happy could possibly await her beloved son in the future.

Meanwhile, Ida was stretched upon her bed at Strathendale, weeping miserably, whilst her mother sat angry and stern by her side, recapitulating for the twentieth time all the heinous enormity of her offence.

"There will be a regular scandal in the neighborhood; you will be stared at wherever you go. We shall have to leave home! What could induce you to

risk your reputation and your prospects in such a manner, you unhappy child?"

"Oh, mamma, I did so want to see Dick again! Indeed I did not mean to stay more than ten minutes there, and then come back again," sobbed Ida.

"Good Heavens! And if Lord Mannering should hear of it, how do you suppose I should account to him for your conduct?"

Then Ida sat up on her bed with clasped hands and red and swollen eyes.

"Mamma! dear mamma!" she cried despairingly, "may I tell him all—the whole truth, I mean? Indeed, I do not love him enough to marry him!"

"Ida! I am ashamed of you! I really never could have imagined that you would become so lost to all sense of propriety as to speak in such a manner! Do you suppose that well-bred young ladies are so immodest as to go into rhapsodies and raptures about loving young men? It is really almost indecent to hear you talking about love—like—like—a person of the lower orders," added Lady Cressida, somewhat at a loss for a sufficiently degrading simile.

To hear her speak and to see her face of indignant disgust, one might have imagined that there was something downright immoral in the mention of love.

Ida only hid her face in her hands and sobbed helplessly. She had made her little effort; she had told her mother that she did not love Lord Mannering, but she did not dare to tell her that she did love Dick Forrester. She had not the courage to court the storm which she well knew such a confession would provoke.

Once she ventured to ask if she might be allowed to see Dick again, if only, she murmured, to explain to him that she could never, never be anything to him.

Lady Cressida appeared to be positively horror-stricken.

"I don't suppose the young man would have the audacity and the impertinence to dream for one moment that you ever could be anything to him! If you have forgotten your position, Ida, I do not imagine he will forget his. See him again? Dear, no! what on earth for? I shall take good care that you never see him again!"

"You talk of him as if he were a groom, mamma. I am sure he is as much a gentleman as papa, or anybody I ever met," remonstrated poor Ida.

"I am sorry you should be so blinded by your prejudice for this wretched youth, as not to see the difference between a man like your own father and these people," said Lady Cressida, contemptuously. "I shall leave you now to endeavor to bring yourself to a better frame of mind."

"Oh, mamma! may I not see papa?"

"Certainly not! He would only be distressed and grieved by your rebellious and improper words."

Lady Cressida was afraid that her husband might be more soft-hearted than herself, and give Ida hopes that her engagement with Lord Mannering could be broken off—a thing she was well determined should never take place.

Poor Ida was left alone in her room to her tears and her hopelessness. She knew now, poor child, that she loved Dick Forrester, but she did not think it possible

that she could break through the many chains, or overstep the deep and wide chasm that divided her life from his. It seemed to her that there was no other fate for her but to marry the man her mother had chosen for her, to make him the best wife that she could, and endeavor as best she could to put Dick Forrester's handsome face out of her memory forever.

She had been capable of a desperate act of physical courage in order to see the man she loved once more; but she was quite incapable of the moral courage necessary to make a strong and determined resistance to the tyranny of a will more powerful than her own. Had Dick been with her, she might have found the support of his presence sufficient to have enabled her to make at least an effort on his behalf; but Dick was not there, and her mother was constantly and unceasingly dinning into her weary ears the self-same expressions of indignant horror at her past conduct, of strenuous injunctions concerning her duty for the future. Ida had no internal source of strength wherewith to resist Lady Cressida's attacks. She submitted miserably and hopelessly, it is true, but meekly enough also, to everything that her mother said to her or told her to do.

Two days passed away—two days of confusion and bustle. There was a packing-up and putting-away of things all over the house, for it was suddenly announced to the astonished household that at this extraordinary early season of the autumn—September was not yet over—the family was going southward to take up its abode in the London mansion in Eaton Square.

On the third day came Dick Forrester, bold as brass and brave as a lion, ringing loudly and unhesitatingly at the front door, and requesting to know if Miss Greythorne were at home, and whether she would see him?

"Miss Greythorne is away, sir," replied the old butler, who was always left in charge at Strathendale. "The whole family have gone to London; they left the house about an hour ago. I was just going to put all the shutters up, sir, when you came."

And poor Dick turned away sick with disappointment. He was stranded, indeed; he had thrown over his prospects in life, and his love had been spirited away.

CHAPTER XVII.

GERTRUDE'S PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM.

Not long after the events which were recorded in the last chapter had taken place in the far North upon the banks of the Lennan, Gertrude Tracy received a piece of intelligence which afforded her much gratification. For some time past Gertrude had been possessed by a mania to have a companion—a paid companion, indeed, but one who should be at the same time a companion and an agreeable friend. All her life long Gertrude had been given to taking sudden and unaccountable fancies, which her mother had never failed to humor and gratify, as far as she had been able to do so. Mrs. Tracy, indeed, possessed ample means to fulfil this last strange whim of her daughter's, and was the more anxious to do so, because Gertrude's temper was now so uncertain and so trying, that she was secretly rejoiced to think of shifting the onerous duty of pleasing and amusing her on to somebody else's shoulders.

Accordingly she wrote to several of her friends mentioning her requirements, and asked them if they could recommend any young lady in poor circumstances who would make a suitable companion for her daughter.

Amongst others she had written, as we have seen, some time previously, to Lady Cressida Greythorne.

The answer, however, had not been satisfactory. Lady Cressida knew, indeed, of such a young lady—a Miss Forrester—whose family was very poor, and who, she thought, would in every way have pleased Mrs. Tracy; but on mentioning the subject to her, Miss Forrester had not been willing to leave home. "A great pity," added Lady Cressida, "as it would have been an advantage to her to render herself independent of her parents."

Here of course the negotiation dropped, but Gertrude Tracy could not dismiss the subject from her mind. She seemed to be possessed of a mania in favor of Miss Forrester, to the exclusion of everybody else. In vain Mrs. Tracy wrote to, and received answers from, several most hopeful and promising young ladies, all willing and eager to become Gertrude's companion. Gertrude herself would have none of them; she only flung down their prettily-worded and neatly-written letters in disgust, and harked back incessantly to Hester Forrester.

"I don't fancy her," she would say impatiently; "the only one I should like is Lady Cressida's Miss Forrester—"

"But, my dear," remonstrated her mother, mildly, "if we can't get Miss Forrester—"

"But we must get her, mamma! She is to be got, I am certain. Write and offer her a higher salary."

"I don't think I should quite like to try and bribe her in that way; she might be offended."

"Fiddlesticks! No one is ever offended at getting more money than they expect! However, there it is—I will have Miss Forrester or nobody!"

"My dear Gertrude, how would you like me to ask one of Aunt Jane's girls to pay us a long visit?"

"Gracious! I should die of it! they are the stupidest, most inane and most vapid young women in Christendom!"

"How can you tell that this Miss Forrester would be any better?"

"I can't tell; I can only *feel.* I have an instinct that I should like her. But, of course, mamma," sulkily turning herself round on her sofa, "of course you are determined to thwart and to cross me in every possible way!"

Poor Mrs. Tracy was too wise to offer a denial; she only sighed resignedly and held her tongue.

The search after companions was suffered to drop, and nothing more was said about it for several weeks.

One morning, however, to her surprise, Mrs. Tracy received a letter from Lady Cressida, reopening the subject of Miss Forrester.

She carried it in triumph into Gertrude's room. Lady Cressida wrote from London, where she told Mrs. Tracy she had gone to get ready her daughter's trousseau, as the marriage would probably be fixed for some time in December.

She went on to state that she had that morning heard from Miss Hester Forrester, who wrote to tell her, that owing to several alterations in family arrangements, her brother having very foolishly thrown over a good foreign appointment, she was now more inclined to take a position as a companion than she had been, and if Lady Cressida's friend had not yet found any one to suit her daughter, she would be very much

obliged if she would kindly mention her name again to her.

Gertrude was enchanted, and insisted upon writing off that very day to Miss Forrester. The negotiations went on apace; everything was satisfactorily arranged, and within a fortnight Hester was installed as an inmate of Orchard Grange.

Meanwhile Lord Mannering lingered at Wilmerton. The old man was still confined to the house, his mother also had returned after her round of visits; and although Florian had in duty bound gone once or twice up to London for the day when the Greythornes were settled in town, he still made his family ties an excuse for remaining at Wilmerton, and did not seem disposed for the present to take up his abode any nearer to Eaton Square.

Truth to say, he made but a very indifferent lover as Lady Cressida herself was perforce obliged to acknowledge; and she was a good deal annoyed by the cool and leisurely manner in which he conducted his love-making. She took good care, however, not to impart her dissatisfaction to any one else. Mr. Greythorne, at his club most of the day, never noticed that his future son-in-law was not all that he should be; and as to Ida, she was too much absorbed in herself, and too utterly low-spirited and heartless, to feel his unfrequent visits as anything but a boon and a relief. Lady Cressida consoled herself by reflecting that many men who are indifferent and undemonstrative lovers make excellent and attentive husbands; and she told herself that, once married, everything would come all right.

"It would be a thousand pities to let such a match be broken off now," she said to herself, "with the old man so ailing and the Wilmerton title on the point of falling in; besides, the trousseau is half bought, and were anything to disturb the marriage now, it might set Ida thinking about that wretched young Forrester again. As it is, she seems to be quite resigned to the necessity of giving him up."

Lady Cressida, however, for all her indignation against "that wretched young Forrester," as she called poor Dick, had no objection to doing Hester a good turn when the opportunity offered itself; and as it seemed to her that for Dick's sister to become Miss Tracy's companion could neither make nor mar Ida's matrimonial prospects, she wrote as we have seen, and recommended her in kind and hearty terms to Mrs. Tracy.

But Lady Cressida knew nothing of the wheels within wheels that were revolving about her daughter's fate; nor could she possibly foresee how important an influence this, to her, insignificant event was destined to have over the lives of most of the actors in this story.

Hester Forrester had been at the Grange about a fortnight. She heard, of course, before she had been two days in the house, that the wooded glades of the lovely park, into which most of the windows of the house looked, belonged to Lord Wilmerton; but either she did not know that the old earl, whom she heard the Tracys speak of as a gouty and troublesome old gentleman, was the grandfather of Ida's betrothed, or else, not knowing that he himself was at the house, it did not occur to her to connect him with Lord Man-

nering. One afternoon she was sitting by Gertrude's couch, and for want of something to do she took up her photograph book and began turning its pages idly over. She and Gertrude got on very well together. Miss Tracy was in a good temper, having got what she wanted; and when in a good temper she knew how to make herself pleasant. Moreover, she had been extracting all the information she could out of Hester, concerning Ida Greythorne; and Hester, who had not, of course, the slightest idea that her questions were prompted by anything but idle curiosity, saw no harm in answering them fully and freely. Hester, too, believed in Gertrude's invalidism more thoroughly than did other people who had known her for years, and who were inclined to give to half her complaints the harsher names of selfishness and indolence; and Gertrude liked to be believed in. The two already called each other by their Christian names, and were in a fair way to becoming friends.

Gertrude lay on her sofa fingering some useless scrap of fancy work, and Hester on a low chair by her side turned over the leaves of the photograph book. Suddenly Gertrude exclaimed, "Who on earth are you looking at so earnestly, Hester? One would think you had discovered the portrait of some old and valued friend."

Hester was indeed bending absorbedly over the book upon her knees, contemplating fixedly one of its pages. When Gertrude spoke to her she started guiltily and blushed crimson. Then she felt angry with herself for being so foolish as to blush, and determined to answer simply and naturally.

"I have certainly come across the portrait, not of an old friend, but of an acquaintance whom I liked very much—the little I saw of him—Mr. Florian."

"Mr. who?" said Gertrude, looking at her sharply.

"Mr. Florian—surely this can be meant for nobody else."

She pushed the book towards her, and Gertrude, to gain a moment of time for reflection and consideration, pretended to examine the portrait. In one instant her shrewd and busy brain perceived that Hester knew the man and yet was ignorant as to who he was. Ida's betrothed was evidently known to her—else how should she recognize his picture and call him by his Christian name?—but Hester apparently did not know that he was Lord Mannering. What advantage might not Gertrude extract from this extraordinary circumstance?

Her first care was to extract the amount of information possessed by her companion without betraying the real state of the case.

"Yes, yes, to be sure," she said. "I did not remember at first who you meant—a good likeness, is it not? Did he tell you his name was Mr. Florian?"

"Ought I then to call him Captain Florian?" inquired Hester, laughing a little and blushing still a good deal. "You see how slight my acquaintance with him is! I did not even know he was in the army!"

"I never heard that he was. No, I don't think he is captain. You met him at Strathendale Castle, I suppose?"

Hester was scrupulously truthful. She had rather not have gone on talking about him; but the arts of

prevarication and evasion were unknown to her. She answered openly, although with some confusion of manner,—

"No. I believe he was staying there, but I never went to the Castle whilst he was there. No; the fact is, I was never properly introduced to him. He rendered me a slight service, a trifling attention, one day out of doors. I talked to him for a few minutes—that was all. You see our acquaintance is of the very slightest. I could hardly claim him as a friend."

"And he told you his name?" said Gertrude, slowly and reflectively.

"Yes; in fact, I asked him what it was. It seems so stupid to talk to a person and not know his name."

Gertrude was quite silent for some minutes. The thought going on in her mind was this,—

"Now, what possible object could he have had in giving her a wrong name—in telling her his Christian name, and in concealing his rank and identity from her? He must have had *some* object in it! I must certainly find it out!"

Hester's next words betrayed more than half of her secret.

"Do you know him well?" she asked timidly. "Does he ever come here? I—I should like to see him again."

"I used to know him pretty well," said Gertrude, coldly. "But no, I don't think you are likely to meet him here."

And she said to herself,—

"I have found you out, my lord! You have been making love to this woman; and if I mistake not, I

shall be able to turn this circumstance considerably to my own advantage."

Her next question was to make assurance sure.

"Did you ever see Lord Mannering, Hester—the man Miss Greythorne is engaged to?"

"No," answered Hester, in a totally altered tone of voice. "I should have liked to see him; but somehow I never did. He was not long at Strathendale, and he went away very soon. Poor Ida!"—with a a gentle sigh, as she recollected certain events that had taken place at The Cottage—"I do hope she will be happy!"

And hearing that sigh, Miss Gertrude Tracy was quite certain that she was right in her supposition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NOVEMBER WALK.

One day not long afterwards Gertrude sent Hester into the neighboring country town to match some wool for her everlasting fancy work. Gertrude had no hesitation in sending Miss Forrester upon her errands in every direction, and Hester was quite ready and willing to go. Truth to say, after the first novelty of the change of scene and companionship had begun somewhat to wear off, Hester was not sorry for an occasional excuse for escaping into the fresh air away from Gertrude's perpetual chatter. Moreover, she dearly loved a walk—and Gertrude never walked.

Once a day she would perhaps stroll slowly round the garden, and two or three times a week she went out for an hour in a low basket-carriage drawn by a fat and lazy pony, which it was Hester's duty to drive along among the lanes at almost a foot's pace—that was the only change of air which Miss Tracy indulged in; and to Hester, accustomed as she was to perpetual air and exercise, the life was somewhat of a trial. She was always glad, therefore, when Gertrude could give her any excuse for a walk into the small town of Eastham, which was situated about two miles off.

The walk, too, was a pleasant one, and led across

fields and through a pretty piece of copse land which, in dry weather, was tempting to linger in.

It was a fine, still November morning—not exactly sunny, but with gleams of brightness from the pale, gray sky, and with a warmth in the air that partook more of the genial breath of the departed summer than of the chills of the fast-coming winter. Hester thoroughly enjoyed her walk. When she got into Eastham, she found, to her annoyance, that it was market-day. The usually quiet little town was crowded and dirty. Fat farmers and still fatter sheep and oxen crowded the narrow High Street; vans and trucks and covered carts of every description filled up the roadway, whilst the pavement was thronged with a noisy and somewhat rough collection of men, who either stood about talking loudly and haggling angrily over their bargains, or shouldered their way rudely and ungraciously amongst their fellow-passengers.

Hester found some difficulty in threading her way through the crowd and in keeping herself clear of their pipes and their rough gestures. It was certainly not a pleasant day for a lady to be walking alone in Eastham. To add to her vexation, she found a good deal of difficulty in fulfilling Gertrude's commission. The color of the wool was troublesome to match; she had to go into three or four different shops before she could get what she wanted.

She was so much absorbed in her errand, and so anxious to avoid attention by hurrying from one shop to the other, that she did not see a tall gentleman, in a gray riding-suit, whom she passed quite close, and who stood at one corner of the principal street, talking to a

respectable-looking farmer, and tapping his boot with his riding-whip.

If she had looked up she would have seen him turn eagerly round as she went by. Then, apparently restraining himself, he contented himself with following her with his eyes, and by moving slowly onwards in the direction she had taken. The rough crowd of men touched their hats, and made way for him respectfully as he went by.

Still continuing his conversation with the farmer whom he had been talking to, and who kept by his side, Lord Mannering, nevertheless, took care not to lose sight of the tall, graceful figure of the lady who went in and out of the little shops in search of her wool.

At length he saw her issue forth out of one of them with a small parcel in her hand. She then turned hastily out of the High Street, as though glad to be rid of it, and took the road that led out of town back towards Wilmerton.

Mannering, then, shaking off the loquacious farmer as hurriedly and unceremoniously as he could, turned into the inn-yard close by, where the ostler was holding his horse, sprang into the saddle, and turned quickly away from the crowd and bustle into the road along which the tall figure of Hester Forrester had already disappeared round a corner.

Once clear of the town and its confusion she relaxed her speed and walked slowly and lingeringly. A little way along the road the field path turned off to the right, and it was easy for the horseman who followed her to perceive the object of his search walking across

two flat and open meadows towards the woods through which the path ran.

Once within the coppice, Hester began to feel rather tired. In spite of the lateness of the season, the air was still and warm. A fallen tree lay temptingly by the wayside. She sat down upon it to rest, with her face to the woods, and her back to the town from which she had come.

Not five minutes later there came a clatter of horses' hoofs behind her, and turning hastily round, she saw Lord Mannering's pretty chestnut mare come neatly over the low stile into the wood. In another minute he had alighted and came forward, eagerly and joyfully, with outstretched hands, to greet her.

It was impossible to mistake the delight with which his whole face beamed; it was easy to see by the happy gleam of his dancing eyes that this meeting was no indifferent matter to him.

As to Hester, she faltered and turned rosy red as she laid her hand within his.

"Mr. Florian!—who would have thought of seeing you?—where do you come from? You have literally dropped from the clouds upon me."

"I saw you in Eastham. You did not see me there, and I followed you. Are you angry?"

"Oh, no!" looking down upon the grass and withered leaves beneath her feet.

"Let me sit down by your side and talk to you."

"Oh, I must get home now."

"Then I will walk with you."

He passed his arm through the chestnut's bridle, and walked slowly on by her side along the narrow wood-

land path. There came a gleam of winter sunshine through the pearl-gray skies that shone upon them as they walked.

And they were happy—supremely happy; no cares for the future, no remorse for the past, no misgivings for the present troubled the serene oblivion of the first dawning breath of a love that neither of them as yet had acknowledged even in the depths of their own hearts. They only knew that they were together, and that they were content. Their talk was in such broken murmurs as lovers all the world over converse in.

"Were you very much startled to see me?"

"Rather—only—"

"Only what?—were you thinking of me?" bending towards her tenderly.

"I did not mean to say that," blushing deeply.

"But you were thinking of me?"

"No—only of your portrait which I saw a few days ago."

"Really?—where was that?"

"In Miss Tracy's photograph album."

A change came over his face—a look of apprehension and even of alarm.

"Do you know Miss Tracy, then?" he asked hastily.

"I am living with her."

"Living with her! with Gertrude Tracy! Good Heavens! what did she tell you about me? Everything that is bad, I suppose."

"No, indeed; she said nothing against you. She hardly spoke of you, indeed."

"Tell me what she said!" he asked, with some anxiety.

Hester looked up with a little surprise and replied,—

"Gertrude said really next to nothing. I found your photograph in her book. I asked her if it was not meant for Mr. Florian?"

"And she said yes?"

"Of course she said yes, and she asked how I knew you. I only told her that I had met you in the North; and I asked her if she knew you well, and whether you were likely to come to the Grange to see her. She merely said she used to know you pretty well, but that you were not likely to come and call now. Perhaps she did not know that you were in the neighborhood."

"And that was all she said?"

"Yes, that was all, as far as I can remember."

Her companion seemed to breathe more freely.

"Tell me," he asked in a lighter voice, "how you, of all people, come to be living with the Tracys?"

And then Hester told him that she had come there as Gertrude's paid companion because her family was poor and it was necessary for her to do something for her own support. She did not tell him about Dick and his love troubles, which had been the indirect cause of her being forced into this step, because she did not consider herself bound to tell her brother's secrets; but she told him about herself, and how Lady Cressida had recommended her to Mrs. Tracy, and how she had thought she would try it.

"I can but go home, you know, if I don't like it," she said in conclusion.

"And do you like it?"

"I don't dislike it; they are very kind to me."

"I would sooner you had been anywhere else than there," he said with some emphasis.

"Do you not like them?"

"They are not my friends. I cannot come to see you at their house."

She looked up at him. There was both disappointment and regret in her face.

"You are not, then, glad that I am here?" she said with a quiver in her voice.

He caught hold of her hand.

"Glad! Why do you ask such questions? Is it to tempt me? You *know* that I am more than glad."

She endeavored to take away her hand, but somehow the attempt was not a very vigorous one, and he drew it almost unresistingly through his arm.

"Look here," he said quickly and eagerly, "I will not come to see you there. I can't explain why; it is a long story. Those women are not my friends. I don't care to go there; but that is no reason why I should not see you often. Are not all the fields and woods and lanes open to us? Why should we meet in public, before others, when we can see each other alone any day of our lives?"

"Indeed, Mr. Florian," remonstrated Hester, with a sudden misgiving as to the strange manner in which he desired their friendship to be carried on, "I had far rather not. It seems almost as if one was doing wrong to meet in that way. Have you not relations of your own? Is your home near here? Do you live here? And, if so, what would your people think of me?"

"Never mind my people. You are not likely to come across them," he answered impatiently. "Yes, I live somewhere near here—at least, I am here at present, and shall remain here now. What a strange girl you are! How can it be more wrong to talk to me out of doors than in a house? Have we not always met out of doors, under the free heavens? And have not our meetings been happy ones? They have, have they not, Hester?"

He murmured her name hesitatingly and softly with a lingering tenderness, as though he loved to dwell upon it.

And Hester, with drooping head and downcast eyes, answered nothing; only she listened to the voice of the charmer, and all her heart went tremblingly out to meet him.

"You will do as I ask you?" he continued persuasively, pressing the hand that he detained still upon his arm. "I know you will. Every evening, wet or fine, I will wait in the orchard behind the Grange garden under the big apple tree that has a bench round it. Ah! you see I know every tree that grows near you; there I shall be every evening of my life. You will not let me wait there alone for you, will you? You will slip out to me if it is only for five minutes—no one will see you. You could not know that I was so near you and not come, could you? Promise me that you will come—to-morrow I shall be there. Promise to meet me."

"I don't know—I cannot say," stammered Hester, confusedly. She was bewildered and fluttered. She was profoundly ignorant of the world; and yet a sure

instinct told her that if he desired to woo he should do so openly and boldly, and in the face of the whole world, and not by stealth and in the darkness.

But there was no time for further argument; already the Grange chimneys had come into sight over the trees. She murmured something that was neither assent nor denial; he pressed her hand hurriedly, sprang on to his horse, and was soon lost to sight among the glades of the wood.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK IN LONDON.

Now, at this time, if there was a thoroughly wretched man in the world that man was Dick Forrester. Dick had not been able to remain at The Cottage on the banks of the Lennan after Strathendale was deserted by its inmates. Moreover, when Hester went off to try her fortunes in the South, Dick did not find his father's house a very cheerful one.

Colonel Forrester had not the same sympathy with his son's love-troubles which his wife had, nor had he the same sanguine dreams for his future in which the fond mother was wont to indulge. It did not seem to the old gentleman, any more than it did to Hester, that Dick was any nearer to becoming the husband of the rich Miss Greythorne because he had rashly and foolishly thrown up his Indian appointment, or because the young lady herself, in a fit of romantic recklessness, had come wading across the Lennan on a stormy night in order to fling herself—according to his old-fashioned notions—in a somewhat indecorous manner into his arms. To Colonel Forrester's more practical mind the whole business assumed a thoroughly prosaic and a decidedly unpleasant aspect.

His son, at the very threshold of an honorable and lucrative career, had flung aside his whole prospects in

order to remain in the same country with a young lady who was engaged to somebody else, and whose parents were not likely to permit her to break through her engagement; and by so doing he had wasted an expensive education, and had thrown himself back—a great, idle, useless fellow—upon his parents' hands.

Colonel Forrester, indeed, considered that Dick had behaved very badly; and although he was a man of few words, he nevertheless made it quite clear to his son that he was thoroughly displeased with him; more especially was his disapproval expressed when Hester, anxious only to relieve the over-taxed family exchequer, insisted upon going away to earn her own livelihood.

"Had it not been for your selfish and inconsiderate conduct, Dick," said Colonel Forrester, as he watched the fly which carried away his favorite daughter from The Cottage, "your sister would not have been reduced to the sad necessity of leaving her home to go and toil amongst strangers."

There was so much truth in this remark, and the truth was of so disagreeable a nature, that Dick had been unable to make any adequate response.

"I will not stay here to be a burden upon you, sir," was all that he could say. "I am going up to London next week to get something to do."

"It is not so easy as you seem to imagine to get anything to do in London. You may be hanging about for months seeking for employment."

"I shall ask Uncle Robert to help me."

Uncle Robert was Mrs. Forrester's brother.

"I don't think you will find that he will do much

for you; and until you get something to do, how are you to live? I can't afford to give you an allowance to support you in idleness."

"Oh, I daresay Margaret will put me up."

Mention has been made in these pages of the eldest child of the Forrester family, who years ago had married a clergyman, now residing in London, her husband having been lately fortunate enough to be presented to a West-end living.

It was to her house that Dick went on his arrival in town, and Mrs. Wright, who was a good-hearted and kindly-natured woman, was glad enough to see something of the young brother who was almost a stranger to her. Mrs. Wright, in fact, was almost a stranger by this time to her own people. They were so far away, and their lives were so totally different from hers, that it seemed impossible for her to care much about them. She was much absorbed in her various occupations—in her husband and his parish, and, above all, in her babies. She wrote, indeed, regularly every week to her mother; her letters were models of propriety, and were almost facsimiles one of the other. They always contained the minutest information concerning Jennie's chilblains and Mary's delicate throat—described the process of bottle-feeding pursued with the baby then on hand, and reported the progress of the dowager infant upon its fat, toddling legs.

Margaret herself was fat and motherly in appearance, and good-tempered in disposition. She was genuinely distressed when she heard that Hester had gone out as a companion. She even wrote and remonstrated with her mother, and suggested that it was rather de-

rogatory to the dignity of the family; but having offered her protest, which of course nobody took any notice of, she forgot all about it, and troubled hersel no further about her. When, soon after, Dick proposed to come and quarter himself in her not very spacious house in Kensington, Margaret was delighted to receive him, bundled two of her little girls out of their bedroom into their father's dressing-room in order to make room for him, and welcomed him with quite a gush of sisterly affection.

Dick, therefore, took up his abode in London, and, needless to say, his very first action was to walk to Eaton Square and look up at Ida's windows. He did not catch sight of her on this occasion—nor, indeed, for many days afterward.

He went to see "Uncle Robert," who was a partner in a City firm; but that gentleman did not seem disposed to befriend him in the matter of finding employment for him, although he professed himself delighted to see his "poor dear sister's boy."

"I have so many sons of my own, you see," he said doubtfully; "but—come and eat your dinner with us on Sunday, my boy. My wife will be delighted to see you; and now you must excuse me if I shake hands with you, as I am very busy to-day."

The dinner on Sunday was productive of no good results. Uncle Robert was civil and even cordial to him, but he was not inclined to give him anything more substantial than an invitation to the family repast on any or every Sabbath he might choose to come.

Dick found the "something to do" which he had talked of so confidently and cheerfully upon the banks

of the Lennan to be no such easy a matter as he had supposed.

Meanwhile, he wandered about the streets aimlessly and wretchedly enough, and found London in Nov ember anything but an exhilarating abode.

One day, whilst strolling homeward through the Park, he suddenly, not far from Hyde Park Corner, came face to face with two ladies, at sight of whom his heart beat wildly and tumultuously—they were Lady Cressida and Ida.

He stopped short, holding out his hand eagerly to them, and Ida half turned and would have stopped, but to his amazement Lady Cressida drew her onwards.

"Come on, my dear, what are you stopping for?—the brougham must be waiting for us at the gate" she said coldly; and, to his astonishment and indignation, she took Ida's arm, and they both passed him without speaking to him, or without even seeming to be aware of his presence. Only Ida raised her eyes for one swift instant to his. They were full of tears, and there was a dumb, pitiful look of enteaty in them, as though to pray him for forgiveness for that which she had no power to prevent.

Dick was left standing there, with his heart full of unspeakable rage and indignation. That they should cut him—for that was what it actually amounted to—was an extent of injury and insult which he had not expected even at Lady Cressida's hands. Neither could he forgive Ida—her cowardice and her abject submission to her mother seemed to him to be something almost contemptible.

He strode home, mad with fury and misery, and sat

up half the night writing to Ida a letter full of reproaches, of despair, and of entreaty—a letter calculated to melt the heart and to strike remorse to the conscience of the least sensitive of woman.

Ida and Lady Cressida got into the brougham; but the drive home had been far from a peaceful one. No sooner was she within the shelter of the carriage than Ida had burst into a flood of angry tears.

"Oh, mamma, how could you make me behave so cruelly, so infamously badly to Dick! What must he think of me!"

"My dear Ida," answered her mother, coldly, "I am really surprised at you. I thought we had done with this disagreeable subject. You ought to see yourself that one cannot know all one's small country neighbors up in town."

"Oh, mamma! I call it quite horrid and very unlady-like to pass an old friend like Dick without even shaking hands with him."

"And what good would it have done you, foolish child?" cried her ladyship, angrily. "I suppose I am the best judge of what is right and proper, and I will not allow that unfortunate young man to come hanging about you in town to the detriment, perhaps, of all your prospects. You must see very well that he is no fit companion for you; he is quite different from any other young man of our acquaintance. Look at his coats!"

Now Dick's coats were not, as I have before mentioned, his strong point; they were ill made, and did not fit him, but he himself was supremely indifferent to the fact.

Even Ida felt that she had nothing to say in favor of his coat. She could not but acknowledge to herself that in the matter of his clothes Dick was certainly at a disadvantage. She attempted no defence of his garments and only wept on in silence in her corner of the carriage.

A long course of suppression and subjection to the maternal authority had by this time broken Ida's spirit and weakened her nerves. She had no strength, either bodily or mental, to stand up against her mother's strong will; but still, when she actually saw Dick again, she did feel a wild desire to rebel against her fate. For a few hours she told herself that she could not and would not marry Lord Mannering; then, again, her heart sank back into a dumb despair.

She knew that Dick was penniless, and she did not think that her parents would be likely to give her an allowance if she persisted in defying their wishes. What would become of her? She had been brought up in such luxury, that to be poor and in want of things she had always been accustomed to seemed to her a fate almost worse than to be miserable as Lord Mannering's wife.

All that evening she sat doing nothing, pretending to read, but weeping silently over her book. Just as she was going to bed a letter was placed in her hands. It was from Dick. She hurried away with it to her own room in order to read it alone; and all night long the poor girl sat up weeping and wailing over it.

Then the next morning something very dreadful happened.

Ida and Lady Cressida were sitting alone in the

drawing-room about eleven o'clock. Mr. Greythorne had gone to his club.

The two ladies were engaged in looking over a large box full of expensive lace handkerchiefs that had been sent for them to choose from. They were, of course, destined to form part of Ida's trousseau.

Ida had dried her tears, and had once more resigned herself to her fate. It was beyond her power to help being interested and amused by such a delightful occupation. She was particularly fond of good lace, and was a competent judge of its merits. The handkerchiefs were very handsome, richly trimmed with every variety of Brussels and Mechlin and Valenciennes; they were spread about all over the table and the sofa, and the two ladies were deeply absorbed in their work of selection.

Lady Cressida, seeing that Ida had apparently forgotten yesterday's misadventure, was in the best and sweetest of tempers with her daughter. So busy were they over their task that neither of them heard the door-bell ring.

Suddenly, in the middle of an animated discussion over Brussels *versus* Valenciennes, the door opened and the footman announced "Mr. Forrester."

CHAPTER XX.

A STORMY SCENE.

Lady Cressida made one bound from her chair into the middle of the room, as though she would, if there had been yet time, have arrested the entrance of the unwelcome visitor. But Dick had already come in.

Ida sat still, white with consternation and terror; she felt ready to sink into the earth.

"I scarcely expect visitors at so early an hour, Mr. Forrester," said Lady Cressida, stiffly. She could hardly avoid holding out her hand, but she did so in the coldest and most formal manner possible.

"I am sorry if I am disturbing you," said Dick, politely, "but I was so extremely anxious to find you and Ida at home that it must be my excuse for calling before lunch."

"*Miss Greythorne* and I," with a significant emphasis upon her daughter's name, "are, as you see, exceedingly busy; still, of course, if you have anything of importance to say"—

"Thanks," said Dick, and without waiting for any further invitation he drew forward a chair and sat down.

"I think, my dear," said her ladyship, turning to her daughter, "that as Mr. Forrester seems to have called on business that you had better leave the room."

Ida rose obediently from her chair, but Dick jumped up and put out his hand to detain her.

"Pray do not go," he said eagerly. "I most particularly wish you to hear what I have to say!"

Ida sat down again.

Lady Cressida looked furious.

"I cannot imagine that what you can have to say can in any way concern my daughter," she said angrily; "however, pray lose no more time in communicating your business to me; if it concerns your parents or your sister, for whom I have a great respect, I shall be happy to give my attention to what you have to say."

Then Dick, who was not wanting either in pluck or determination, stood boldly up in his place and said these words:—

"What I have come here this morning to say, Lady Cressida, is this: I am not a child to be put off with empty words, nor am I an inferior to be regarded with only one degree less contempt than you would treat your footman. I am a man, and I am a gentleman born and bred, and I am only inferior to your daughter in the matter of money; in every other particular I am her equal, and as her equal I come here to tell you and her that to marry her against her will to a man she does not love—when you and she know perfectly well that she loves me—is an iniquitous action—"

"How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Pray do not interrupt me. Ida, I have come to say to you that I am tired of your vacillation and your inaction, and that the time is now come for you to

choose between happiness and misery—between truth and falsehood—between the man you do not love, and do not want to marry, and the man whom you love and who should be the only one on earth whose wife it can be possible that you should become! and I am here to-day to bid you make your choice boldly before your mother's face, that she may see herself how impossible it is that you should go on with an engagement that is hateful and odious to you, and can only end in utter and life-long misery!"

Lady Cressida could hardly believe her ears—the bold and determined words to which she listened almost paralyzed her with dismay. She became white with anger.

"Leave the room, sir—leave the house instantly," was all that at the first moment she was able to gasp, whilst Ida wrung her hands together, sobbing,—

"Oh! Dick—Dick! pray—pray go away—you have made things ten times worse; mamma will never forgive you. Oh! pray go away!"

But Dick strode across the room to her side and took her by the arm, not gently and tenderly, but angrily and roughly. He was no soft-voiced, sweet-mannered lover, but a man whose passions were all strong and vigorous and who would brook no evasion and no double-dealing, not even in the woman whom he loved with all the strength of his stern nature.

"No, I will *not* go!" he said, and his grasp upon her arm was so firm and strong that he actually hurt her. "I will not go until you have answered me. Either be true to yourself and to your own better nature, and to your heart, which is really mine—cast

in your lot with me—or else keep to your fine lover and his title, and sink yourself forever in my eyes to the most contemptible and despicable creature upon the face of the earth. I *will* have an answer."

"Take your hand off my daughter's arm!" cried Lady Cressida. "Do you not see you are hurting her? And pray, do you call it the action of a man and a gentleman to come here and try to frighten a poor girl into disobeying her parents? I am sorry that Mr. Greythorne is out, Mr. Forrester."

"And so am I, Lady Cressida," said Dick, more gently, and loosing his hold of Ida's arm, "for he would understand that I am not in a mood to be trifled with! Every man living has a right to an answer when he asks a woman to be his wife; and that answer I will receive from your daughter's own lips ere I leave your house!"

"And pray, Mr. Forrester, what sort of farce do you call it to ask a lady to be your wife when you have not the means to support her?" cried Lady Cressida, contemptuously. "You are counting upon my daughter's money, upon which you are hoping to live in idleness! You have nothing of your own to justify you in presuming to ask her to marry you!"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Cressida," said Dick, firmly and respectfully. "To begin with, I am *not* counting upon Ida's money, for I don't want it, and would rather have herself penniless than all the thousands which you will probably refuse to give to her should she decide to be my wife. I am certainly not counting upon her money, because I do not want it; and I have, as it happens, the means of supporting a wife.

Since I wrote to you last night, Ida," turning towards her—

"You dared to write to her!" gasped Lady Cressida.

Dick continued as though he had not heard the interruption.

"By this morning's post I have received an offer of an agency for an insurance company; an old friend of my mother's whom I met at dinner last Sunday at my uncle's house, has kindly interested himself on my behalf and has got me this appointment; it is three hundred a year to begin with, and a prospect of something better in a couple of years' time if I can manage the work well. I do not say, Ida, that three hundred a year is wealth; but I do say that if you really love me, you will not be afraid to begin life with me upon this; for if your father is too angry with you for marrying me to allow you anything at all in addition, I can at any rate support you in a humble way."

"I never heard anything so ridiculous in all my life!" cried Lady Cressida; "three hundred a year—it is not enough for her pocket-money!" And indeed Ida had been accustomed to spend more than that sum annually upon her dress and the countless little trifles which she was perpetually purchasing.

"What do you say, Ida?" said Dick, turning to her. "It is for you to decide."

Poor Ida stood, turning red and white alternately, the picture of misery and indecision. She knew very well that she loved Dick; but she did not at all know that she was prepared to give up everything that had made life pleasant to her and to marry him upon three hundred a year. If her parents would approve of him,

and give him her money as well as herself, she would be glad enough to throw over Lord Mannering for him —but to marry upon three hundred a year—that was a very different matter!

"It sounds very little, Dick," was all she said, trembling and shivering, poor child, between the angry looks of her mother and the imperative demands of her lover.

And then Dick reached out his hand in silence, and took his hat from the table with a brow as black as thunder. He walked to the door, and then turned round and looked at her, with such scorn and contempt in his face as made her cower and shrink, and hide her face with a little cry of dismay from his sight.

"Good-by, then, you poor, weak, contemptible creature; you have not the strength to be honest, nor the courage to be true. I leave you to the fate you have chosen; and I leave you thankfully and almost gladly, for you are unworthy of my love; be happy if you can with your money and your loveless life, and may God forgive you the bitter wrong you have done to the man whom you love!"

The door closed upon him, and the two women heard his retreating footsteps go rapidly away down the stairs.

Ida sprung to her feet; every vestige of color had fled from her face; with gasping breath, and widely-dilated eyes, she stood staring wildly at the door through which her lover had vanished; she had no power to speak or to call him back, only his words rang like a death knell of happiness and love in her distracted ears and upon her half-maddened brain.

The first thing that roused her was the voice of her mother, who came to her side with outstretched arms.

"My brave, noble child! how well you have behaved during this trying scene—how proud I am of you, and how delighted I am to find that my child has been able to show a proper spirit of independence, and a due sense of her own position!"

But Ida turned upon her mother such a look of loathing and hatred, that even Lady Cressida shrank back abashed before her.

"Do not touch me, mamma," she said in a hoarse, broken voice; "do not speak to me, if you do not wish to hear me say words to you that we should neither of us forget until our dying day! You have ruined my life and destroyed my happiness—you have sent away from me the only man on earth I shall ever love—and you have sent him away loathing and despising me—spurning me away with his foot like the mud of the street! Is not that enough work for you for one day? for pity's sake spare me the additional misery of hearing you triumph over your handiwork, and leave me alone!"

Lady Cressida looked at her in dismay and amazement; she had never seen Ida in this mood before, it was something new to her to encounter in her meek and gentle daughter this spirit of wild and reckless despair, like the struggle of an animal that has been hunted to the death, and turns at bay at the last in one supreme effort of fruitless resistance.

She shrank back from her daughter's wild words, and from the blaze of anger and indignation in those usually soft and lovely eyes.

"Ida!" she faltered, for once unable to hold her own in the face of this new difficulty, "you fill me with as-

tonishment! I had no idea, of course, you cared for the man in this way—a girl's idle fancy—of course, had I understood it was anything more, something might have been done—some arrangement might have been made—"

Ida put up her hand to arrest her words.

"Hush!" she said shortly, "the evil is done—it is irreparable—it was not all your fault; alas! my punishment is but too richly deserved—you heard his words—his farewell words to me!—he scorns and despises me—he considers me unworthy of his love! He will never forgive me; he is too hard! I know him well enough—it is too late now!"

She made a few tottering steps towards the door, then suddenly flinging up both arms wildly above her head, she sobbed out again, in an agony of despair,—

"Too late—too late!" then sank down senseless across the threshold whence Dick Forrester had so lately disappeared from her sight.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LOVE TRYST.

"EVERY evening, wet or fine, I will be under the apple tree in the orchard at nine o'clock," was what the man whom in her dreams Hester Forrester called "Mr. Florian" had said to her.

It was three days ago since he had said it to her, and yet she had never gone out to see whether he had kept his word and gone there to meet her.

All day long she had thought of it, wondering whether she should go—debating the thing in her own mind—longing to see him again, and yet striving to resist the temptation to do what her conscience disapproved of.

At length, on the third evening after her meeting with him, her desire to see him once more overpowered her scruples, and her heart won the day over her conscience.

She crept softly out of the drawing-room when the little trio of ladies had returned to it after their dinner was over, and going up to her own room, wrapped herself up in a long warm cloak, and put on her hat.

"How restless Miss Forrester seems to be in the evening now," observed Mrs. Tracy, when their visitor had left the room.

"Yes," said Gertrude, thoughtfully.

She had not been unobservant of her companion's abstraction of mind; for Hester was too unaccustomed to disguise her thoughts, and too candid in disposition to be able to conceal with any cleverness the perplexity of mind and the fulness of heart which absorbed her.

Gertrude Tracy had watched her keenly and closely.

"She is in love," had said that accurate observer to herself, "and she has seen him again," and Gertrude was determined to let nothing escape her notice.

A few minutes after Hester had left the room on this particular occasion, she rose softly from her couch and followed her into the hall.

There outside, in the darkness of the porch, stood Hester, wrapped in her long cloak, looking out into the night. She looked up at the star-flecked sky, then down the road towards the gate; half went forward, and then again half drew back, as though uncertain as to what she would do; then, finally, appearing to make up her mind, she gathered her cloak about her, and started forth swiftly into the darkness.

Gertrude Tracy reached herself a thick shawl from the cloak-stand and wound it round her head and shoulders, and, after waiting for a few moments in the hall, she followed the footsteps of her friend.

Under the apple tree at the far end of the orchard a man had been restlessly pacing up and down for some minutes. Every now and then he paused and listened; then, as only the moan of the night winds among the naked branches overhead met his ears, he sighed impatiently, and resumed his walk.

"She will not come," he said half aloud to himself. "How many more nights am I going to wait here in

this manner? I could never have believed that any woman would have had the power to make me dance about night after night in a damp orchard in this fashion. What is the use of it all? what am I doing it for? what is it to lead to?—lucky indeed for her, did she only know it, if she does not come—for, alas! what can I give her? and yet if I could but know one single moment of happiness—if I could but hold her once in my arms and press my lips but once to hers, it seems to me as if then I could go away and forget her, and the rest of my life would be more bearable to me."

Then suddenly his heart leaped up wildly and tumultuously, for there, amongst the dark trunks of the trees, he saw a female figure coming towards him. He sprang joyfully to meet her.

"Hester! is it really you? This is indeed good of you."

She hardly answered him, save by a vague inaudible murmur, and she strove to withdraw her hands from his close grasp, but Florian was at the hour of his triumph, since she had come to him; he knew surely enough that her heart must be his, and all the hunger and longing that he had felt for her presence was unable any longer to be satisfied, save in the full knowledge and certainty of her love.

"My darling," he murmured, drawing her passionately towards him, and in another instant her head rested upon his shoulder, her wildly-beating heart was strained to his own, and his lips were raining down close, hot kisses upon hers.

Was there ever rose without a thorn, or a garden of

Eden where the trail of the serpent was not left over the fairest parterre of flowers?

No sooner had Mannering realized the passionate wish of his heart and tasted of that bliss which a few minutes ago he had told himself would raise him to the highest pinnacle of human happiness—nay, ere yet the kiss of love was over—than the reaction and the horror against his own conduct, which was inevitable to a man of honor and of good feeling, shot like a pang of physical pain through his heart.

"I am behaving like an unprincipled brute," he said to himself, and almost unconsciously he put Hester's yielding form a little farther from him; "if I heard of such conduct in any other man I should consider him unworthy of the name of gentleman."

And then a gleam of flickering starlight fell upon Hester's lovely face and upon all the bewildering beauty of her grand, dark eyes—there was no longer any concealment or any reticence in their soul-enchanting depths; all her love shone pure and fervent through the "windows of her soul." To Hester, who had rested upon her lover's heart and had raised her lips to his, there was no longer any concealment or any artifice necessary to hide her from his eyes. She was of too noble a nature to go through the farce of a reticence which she longer felt—such an idea would have seemed to her to be pure childishness. Florian could see all the strength of love—all the utter abandonment of self—in those upturned eyes that met his confidingly and adoringly. Unspeakable remorse filled his soul as he saw it.

"How good you are to trust yourself to me in this

way!" he cried. "How do you not know that I am not deceiving and tricking you? You know nothing of me, and yet you give yourself to me without a thought or a suspicion!"

"Why should I not trust you?" she answered, smiling, and coming back of her own accord within the loving shelter of his arms. "Have you not truth and honor and goodness written in your face? It is true that I have known but little of you—that your position in life, your pursuits or your profession, your people and your kindred, are subjects upon which I know absolutely nothing. I know one thing only—that you love me, and that is enough for me; in your own good time, I daresay, you will tell me all that is right and fitting for me to know; but I ask for nothing but your love—I desire nothing but to give you my own!"

He drew her silently and closely to his heart, unable to find words wherewith to answer her. For some minutes he caressed her in absolute silence. It came into his mind to tell her all—to confess the whole truth to her, to throw herself entirely upon her love and her mercy. If he had but done so!

But then the weakness of his nature made him shrink from such a step. What if her love of truth and of honor should recoil horror-stricken from his falseness to Ida and his duplicity to herself? What if the discovery of his double-dealing should poison all the fountain-heads of her love and turn the sweet spring of her devotion into bitterness and hatred? The risk, he felt, was too great to be encountered; he did not dare to tell her the truth. But neither would he continue to pour smooth-worded falsehoods into her

pure and confiding ears. Something, he felt, must be told her—something to let her understand that he had led her basely into a path that was not all of roses.

So he chose a middle way, that was neither wholly false nor yet wholly true.

"My darling," he said, "I fear I have behaved terribly badly to you."

She looked up for one moment, with a little surprise, into his face, and then, with a confiding smile, nestled down closer again into his arms.

"Do you know that I had no business to make love to you at all? The fact is, I—I am not in a position to marry you—"

"You are poor, I suppose," she said quickly. "Of course—I had guessed it. Do you suppose I mind that? Can we not be true to each other, and wait—for years, if need be?"

"It is not only that," he went on hesitatingly, unwilling, however, to undeceive her upon so convenient and useful a plea as that of poverty, since she herself had invented it, "there are family reasons as well; my relations will not allow me to marry as I wish. Our engagement will have to be kept a secret; no one on earth must know of it but our two selves. It might be fatal to our happiness were any of my family to have the slightest suspicion of it."

"I do not like secrecy," said Hester, slowly.

"Nevertheless, my own, it is secrecy which, alas! I am forced to demand from you."

"And for how long is this secrecy to be maintained?"

"That, I fear, I cannot tell you; it will depend so

much upon circumstances—circumstances which, alas! I have no power to explain to you, for they concern other persons as well as myself, and I am utterly unable to tell you of them. Hester, can you consent to trust me, even upon such terms as these?"

She was silent for a minute, absorbed in painful and bewildering thought, then suddenly she flung her arms impetuously up about his neck.

"It is not likely that I should refuse you the very first thing that you have asked of me?" she cried. "What is there on earth I would not do for you, my own, my love? Trust you? Of course I trust you, with my whole life and my whole love, until death shall divide my faithful heart from yours."

I think that Lord Mannering never felt so utterly small in his own eyes, so utterly foolish and contemptible in his own estimation, as at that minute, when the women he loved hung about his neck and poured forth those passionate and adoring words into his ears.

He could find no words to answer her; he only kissed her in silence. There are times when kisses, like charity, cover a multitude of sins. They fill in a number of gaps in the fond converse of lovers which would otherwise yawn awkwardly and unpleasantly perceptible in their interviews. A sense of boredom, a slight weariness with each other, and, as in the present instance, a want of openness and truth on one side, and a too fervently-expressed confidence on the other, may all be comfortably bridged over by a few kisses. They fill up the vacant spaces, are eminently appropriate and fitting to the occasion, are

generally received with gratitude and pleasure, and are taken to mean—oh! so infinitely more than they actually do.

Thus Hester was perfectly satisfied by her lover's silent kisses, whilst he, in the exercise of an expected attention which was excessively agreeable and pleasant to himself, found means to evade a dangerous topic and to renew their intercourse upon a safer and less difficult basis.

"You will meet me here again to-morrow, love?" he murmured fondly.

"Yes, of course, if you wish it," she answered, "since it is evident that I must be satisfied with seeing you in the dark at present; and now I must go in, or I shall be missed. Do you know, Mr. Florian," laughingly, "that I do not even know your Christian name? What am I to call you?"

"John is my other name," answered Florian, truthfully enough, for he was christened John Florian; but he was thankful for the darkness which concealed the flush that rose to his brow from her eyes.

"Then good-by, John," she said softly, and lifted her lips once more to his.

They parted with a long and tender embrace, with many broken words of loving regret, and many low-voiced vows of meeting again on the morrow; and long after her figure had disappeared amongst the twisted orchard trees towards the house, Florian stood watching the spot whence her dark form had vanished from his sight.

At length he, too, turned and left the place. Then, and not till then, a dark form rose stealthily from be-

hind a clump of trees, where, favored by a depression in the ground, it had hitherto crouched unseen, and stood up in its place, some few yards from where the lovers had so lately parted.

"You are a nice sort of young man!" said Gertrude Tracy, aloud, with a short, bitter laugh, clenching her fist savagely in the direction in which Lord Mannering had disappeared. "After all these years, my lord, I think I see my way to pay you back at last!"

CHAPTER XXII.

LORD MANNERING'S PROPOSITION.

"It is time your wedding-day was fixed, my boy," said Mannering's grandfather to him one morning at breakfast.

Lady Mannering, who spent as much of her time away from her father-in-law's house as possible, had left Wilmerton for a few days' visit in a neighboring county.

"Oh, as long as you are so unwell, my dear sir—" began Mannering.

"Pooh! stuff and nonsense! you talk as if I was on my death-bed. There is nothing to put off your marriage. Let it be fixed at once, and let it be as soon as possible."

"Miss Greythorne is getting her trousseau ready. I don't know how long that operation takes."

"Oh! a sensible girl can always manage to curtail her shoppings if necessary. By the way, Florian, it seems to me that for an attentive lover you are seldomer in town, and oftener down here, than you ought to be. If I were Miss Greythorne I should not like it. You had better leave me now, my boy, and take up your quarters in town."

"I assure you, sir, that I infinitely prefer being here," said his grandson, with some eagerness.

The old man looked at him sharply.

"You are not up to any more follies, I trust?" he said suspiciously.

"My dear grandfather!"

"Well, well, a burnt child dreads the fire, you know; and I must tell you, Florian, that it has crossed my mind that you might be running after that girl at the Grange again."

"Sir! What girl?" faltered Florian, turning red and white alternately.

"What girl? Why, that sly, underhand little minx, Gertrude Tracy, whom you made an idiot of yourself over once before. What other girl do you suppose I mean?"

"Oh! Gertrude Tracy!" cried Mannering, laughing, and feeling unspeakably relieved, for at the first moment the "girl at the Grange" seemed to his guilty conscience to point to no one else than Hester. "I could not think whom you meant at first. No, you need not alarm yourself on her account. I do not think I am in any danger from that young woman's fascinations now, whatever I may have been as a youngster."

"Well, well, I am glad of it," said Lord Wilmerton, pacified, but only half satisfied. "I certainly have seen you sneaking across the park once or twice in that direction of late. I can only hope there's no woman at the bottom of it."

"That is scarcely likely," said Florian, and hastened to turn the conversation into other channels.

The old man, however, seemed determined to pursue the subject of his grandson's marriage, and to urge its being fixed at an early date.

He talked and talked about it till poor Mannering was driven nearly distracted, and finally made some excuse of letters to write for the early post in order to leave the room.

When the two met again at lunch, Florian found to his dismay that there was more than mere talk in the matter.

"Well, I have done a fine stroke of business this morning, my boy," said the old gentleman, cheerfully, rubbing his hands together.

"Pray, what is that, sir?" inquired Florian, with polite unconcern, as he helped himself to cold beef.

"I have written to Lady Cressida, in your name and in my own, to ask her to fix the very earliest day possible for your wedding."

Lord Mannering as nearly lost his temper as his respect to his grandfather admitted of.

"Really, sir! I do think you might have left so delicate a task to me. Ida will consider it most strange, most unaccountable, that such a topic should have been broached by any one else than by myself."

"Nonsense! I mentioned your name particularly as joining me in the request; and if I know anything of the old lady—no disrespect to your mother-in-law intended, my boy—she will be quite flattered and pleased that I should take the trouble of writing to her myself about it."

The first post was irretrievably gone—beyond recall. Remonstrance was in vain, anger could avail nothing. Lord Mannering swallowed his disgust, as well as his luncheon, in silence, and made his escape from the room as the ungenial meal was concluded.

For the rest of the day he was utterly wretched. His difficulties seemed to be closing upon him on every side ; he could see no way to escape out of them. His engagement to Ida bound him down hand and foot, and his grandfather's interference would too probably only rivet his chains the closer and lead him still nearer to the conclusion of a now hateful marriage. On the other hand, to give up Hester was still more impossible. He loved her with his whole heart and soul. Every evening meeting with her—and several more had taken place since the first—increased his devotion to her, and rendered her dearer to him. The mere thought of resigning her was more than he was able to contemplate ; it was impossible ; and yet it is certain that it was equally impossible to marry them both. What, then, was he to do ?

To pursue any other less honorable course with regard to Hester was clearly out of the question, neither did such a thing even enter into his head ; but then, if his marriage with Ida Greythorne was inevitable, what, in the name of fortune, was he to do about Hester Forrester ? Why, he asked himself angrily—why could not that meddlesome old man leave him alone in peace to his happiness and his fool's paradise ? He had shut his eyes successfully to the future ; he had lived in the delight of the present and he had been happy ; but now—all was altered, and he was a miserable man.

At length a bold idea suggested itself to him. What if he were—like Alexander of old—to cut the Gordian knot of his difficulties in twain with one stroke ? He shrank from the dishonor of an explanation with Ida—

from the scandal and the confusion which such a course of action would entail; from the family indignation, the anger of Lady Cressida, the tears and the fainting fits probably of Ida herself. He simply had felt it impossible to subject himself by his own doing to such an ordeal, in which his own family and Ida's would equally and most deservedly cry shame upon him. But how would it be were he to fly from all this, leaving the storm and the confusion to rage themselves out behind his back? The idea of taking Hester away with him secretly, of persuading her to go with him to London, there to be married early in the morning, and then at once to carry her off abroad, presented itself to his mind with a thousand advantages and attractions. He would in this manner escape all that he dreaded; he would leave his perplexities all behind him; he need not return until the storm should be over. A letter to Ida would be far easier to write than personally to encounter her despair and her mother's fury; and above all, once married to Hester he would be able safely to own to her the deception he had practised upon her with respect to his name and position. Moreover, a runaway marriage presented a good many charms to his somewhat poetical and romantic mind. There would be something delightful, it seemed to him, in carrying off his bride secretly and by night; in marrying her without bridesmaids or breakfast, settlements or speeches; in having her all to himself, without any interference from a crowd of relations; and then, like the Lord of Burleigh, how charming it would be to reveal to her that he was no poor and obscure man who had thus wooed his bride, but the bearer of a noble

name and the heir of an ancient and aristocratic house.

Full of this delightful idea, Lord Mannering awaited with some impatience the arrival of the evening hour when he should be able to impart to Hester his plans.

He had arranged and settled them all in his mind before nine o'clock came—down to the minutest detail; there was, however, one person whom he had forgotten to consider in making these arrangements, and that was Hester herself.

Great was his disappointment and consternation when, at the very first excited and somewhat incoherent words by which he revealed his project to her, she shrank away almost in horror from his arms.

"Do you mean that you want me to run away with you?" she said in amazement.

"Well, darling, you may call it running away if you like, but we can go as quietly as you like. We have nothing to do but to walk half a mile across the fields to the station and take the ten o'clock train up to town. I will find you a lodging with an old servant for the night, and I shall have a license all ready, and we can be married the very first thing in the morning, and be off to Paris before twelve o'clock."

"But," said Hester, more bewildered and more puzzled by this extraordinary proposition than she knew how to express, "but, dearest, what is the occasion for such an action? have I not told you that I will wait any time—years, if need be—until you are able to overcome the difficulties you hinted to me, and to marry me openly? Is it possible that you doubt my constancy and my truth to you?"

"No, not for worlds; but I should be far happier married to you," was the only argument which he could find to urge.

Hester was silent for a few minutes, then she said very gravely and earnestly,—

"I can never consent to marry you in such a manner, John. Dearly as I love you, I have others in the world besides you—my father and mother—my brother; for your sake I have consented to keep our engagement a secret from them, but I will never do anything to bring discredit upon my family, nor be married to any man in such a fashion that it may be said of me that I was doing something shameful and disgraceful; neither shall you ever have cause to look back to your wedding-day as a day of humiliating self-reproach! You must make me your wife boldly and openly in the face of the whole world, or I will never be your wife at all!"

Here was a dead-lock to all his hopes and plans! In vain Lord Mannering implored and entreated, in vain he reproached her for want of trust in him—for lukewarmness of affection. Hester remained as adamant.

"I love you with all my heart!" she said, "and you know that I do, but I will never consent to marry you in such a fashion!"

And from this determination there was no moving her. The whole of Hester's nature revolted against the scheme; there was an amount of duplicity, a suggestion of wrongdoing, almost amounting to guilt, about it, which was absolutely abhorrent to her honest and open character! It had been an effort—how great no one but herself knew—to consent to a secret engagement, and to the stealthy method of their meetings; it

was not what she liked or approved of, but for her lover's sake she had make this concession to his wishes, but to consent to a runaway marriage was utterly beyond her.

In vain were all his pleadings and his prayers; she would not yield to him.

"Think over it all to-morrow, and let me know in the evening," he said at last.

"If I thought over it until doomsday my answer would be the same!" replied Hester.

"I trust and hope your love for me will lead you to give me a more favorable reply. I will not take this as final."

She shook her head, and the lovers parted somewhat coldly.

Gertrude Tracy had been again a listener to their interview; as she followed slowly in Hester's footsteps back to the house she laughed softly to herself.

"I can see my way to a very pretty little plan indeed. Oh! how nicely you are playing into my hands, my lord; and what a charming little retaliation I am preparing for you and for your insolent old grandfather; it will be killing two birds with one stone!" and she could not help laughing aloud as she thought over it.

The next morning, at an early hour, Lord Wilmerton sent for his grandson, and, with a face of grave concern, placed in his hands a telegram he had just received from Lady Cressida Greythorne:—

"My daughter dangerously ill; pray send Lord Mannering at once! Can give no answer to your letter at present."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IDA'S ILLNESS.

THERE was consternation and woe at Eaton Square, and great lamentation and weeping, for Ida lay dangerously ill of brain fever. The shock of that painful scene when Dick had left her with words of contempt and loathing had been very great; but although ill and upset, she might have escaped a severe attack had not Lord Wilmerton's letter, following so immediately upon it, added a still further strain to her already weakened system.

Lord Wilmerton had been right in supposing that Lady Cressida would be flattered by his letter. She was delighted with it, and took it in triumph to her daughter, imagining that it would furnish her with an additional inducement to enable her to hasten on the marriage. She little foresaw the effect it would have upon Ida.

"You see, my dear, there is no more shillyshallying possible," had said Lady Cressida to her as she handed her Lord Wilmerton's letter. "Read this for yourself, and see how deeply your honor is pledged to carry out your engagement. They are eager that the day should be fixed. It is impossible, after this letter, that there can be any further delay; it must be settled at once. I will speak to your father this very afternoon, so that

I may answer Lord Wilmerton's most kind letter to-day."

Poor Ida only clasped her hot, trembling hands together and murmured,—

"Oh, mamma! have mercy upon me, I beseech you!"

"Mercy! Fiddlesticks!" cried her ladyship sharply. "I never heard such rubbish in my life! What does a girl who is going to make the best match of the year want with *mercy* indeed? I never heard anything so sensational and so absurd in all my life!"

Ida answered never a word. The day wore on; Mr. Greythorne came in, and Lady Cressida sought him in his study.

"A most flattering letter from Lord Wilmerton, Tom. He and dear Mannering seem most anxious for the wedding-day to be fixed, and really I see no reason why it should be deferred. What do you say?"

"I am sure I have no objection, my dear. It is for you and Ida to decide. I thought there was this trousseau."

"Oh, we can easily finish that off now. Everything is ordered, and most of the things have been sent home already. There is no reason why the marriage should not take place in a fortnight; it would please the earl."

"Well, if everybody wishes it, I am quite willing that it should be so. Wait a minute, Cressida," for his wife was already at the door.

She paused, holding it half open, and looked back at him.

"Are you *quite* sure, my dear, that the child is perfectly happy about her marriage?"

"Who—Ida? Why, of course she is! What can make you think she is not?"

"I don't know—I had a fancy. Once I caught her in tears, and she wouldn't tell me what she was crying for; and I have fancied that she looks thin and ill of late. She has lost her pretty color—she is either as white as a sheet or else she flushes unnaturally at the slightest thing. Are you *perfectly* certain she is satisfied with her prospects?"

"My dear Tom, not the slightest doubt of it! But to tell you the truth, an engagement is a trying time to a girl. There are little *contretemps*, uncertainties and misunderstandings which, until people are actually married, it is difficult to clear away; and I daresay you yourself may have noticed that Mannering is not here so often as might be?"

"Yes, indeed I have noticed it," cried her husband, decidedly; "and by Jove, if you think the fellow doesn't appreciate his good fortune, he shan't have my girl at any price."

"My dear Tom," said Lady Cressida, laughing, "how you do run away with an idea! Of course he appreciates Ida fully; but he is very much tied to his grandfather just now, and it is difficult for him to be here as much as he would wish. Of course, when they are married, he can take her there and it will be all right; but meanwhile it has been a little trying to poor Ida, and no doubt she is not looking well. I think, for her own happiness, the sooner she is married the better."

"Then by all means let the marriage be soon. I would not have the child worried for the world!" said her father, decidedly.

Lady Cressida retired triumphant, and went upstairs to impart her news to her daughter.

"You are to be married in a fortnight, Ida. Your father has given his consent, and I am going to write to Lord Wilmerton at once, to settle the day. Shall it be on Wednesday the 18th or Thursday the 19th?"

Ida stared at her for a moment as if she had hardly heard her—a look of blank horror came into her eyes; she put her hands up to her head as though she had been struck—then suddenly there burst from her lips a wild, shrill scream, that rang with a fearful distinctness through the stillness of the house, summoning Mr. Greythorne in terrified haste from his study, and sending the servants flying in every direction. They carried Ida up to her room in the raving madness of a wild delirium—she knew no one about her—she beat the air with her hands and cried aloud for help.

"Save me! save me!" were the only words that for hours she uttered over and over again with a pitiful and painful reiteration.

Three doctors, summoned in desperate haste, were ere long by her bedside. Ice was applied to her head, and everything done that science could suggest to lower her temperature. But for some hours after the first attack the fever ran so high that when Lady Cressida said weepingly to the eminent physician who presided in the sick-room,—

"She was to have been married in a fortnight," he answered her, gravely,—

"Then if you think the gentleman she is engaged to would wish to see her again, I should strongly advise you to telegraph to him at once. I cannot

tell how things may turn during the night; it is all a toss up."

So instead of her projected letter to Lord Wilmerton, Lady Cressida had to telegraph to him to send up Lord Mannering at once. She was very unhappy, poor woman—it was in vain that she said to herself that no one could ever have foreseen it, or have imagined that a sweet-tempered girl like Ida could have worried herself literally into an illness about a man whom no parents in their senses would have allowed her to marry. For of course she knew that it was all about Dick Forrester that Ida was so ill, and that she herself had persecuted and goaded her on to madness.

"I ought to have let her alone, things would have worked round all right in time," said the poor woman weepingly, to herself; "but then, how was I to know she would take things so seriously as this?"

It was an aggravation of her wretchedness also to witness her husband's absolute despair. Mr. Greythorne was almost beside himself with misery. After all, Ida was the only one thing the two possessed on earth to love, and if she were taken from them, their lives would be empty indeed.

Very late that night Lord Mannering arrived in Eaton Square. He wore, it is true, a face of deep concern; but either he did not realize the extent of Ida's danger, or else he concealed his feelings more cleverly than did the weeping parents who met him in the drawing-room. As it happened, just before he arrived there had been a slight abatement in the symptoms of the fever, and no one, not even Lady Cressida, was allowed to enter the sick-room. Ida's delirious cries

had subsided into low, inarticulate moans, and her frantic efforts to leave her bed into restless tossings from side to side.

There was nothing for Lord Mannering to do but to hear all the sad details over and over again, and to press in sympathy the hands of the afflicted parents.

"I was on the point of writing to your grandfather to fix your wedding for the 18th," said Lady Cressida, weeping.

Lord Mannering felt himself to be the most fearful hypocrite. He was forced to make some suitable answer, whilst internally he ejaculated an involuntary "Thank God!" that the letter which would have fixed his doom had never been sent!

"I cannot imagine what brought it on," said Mr. Greythorne, for the hundredth time.

"Dr. A—— said it must have been brewing for some time," said Lady Cressida.

"He suggested trouble of mind, too; but what trouble could the poor darling have had that we should know nothing about?"

Then somebody called Mr. Greythorne from the room, and Lady Cressida was left alone with her future son-in-law. Even at such a time as this Lady Cressida could not help making use of an opportunity. Mr. Greythorne's last remark suggested an appropriate observation to her.

"I did not like to tell her father—it would only aggravate his unhappiness, poor man!" she said confidentially; "but I fear, my dear boy, that possibly *you* may have been—indirectly, of course, but still, in some measure—to blame for this illness."

"I, Lady Cressida!" exclaimed Florian. "How can that be possible?"

"Well, my dear Florian"—laying her hand soothingly upon his arm—"pray don't be angry with me; but at such a time as this I feel I must speak the truth at all risks."

"Certainly! Pray say what you mean."

"Well, I think if you had been with her a little more—you see she is very sensitive—I know she has fancied things—that you were not quite so devoted, perhaps—indeed, *I* never thought so. I know quite well it is only your manner, and that your heart is in the right place; still, if you had come here a little oftener, perhaps—Well, well! I will say no more, for I see that I am giving you pain; but the poor child is very much in love with you."

And when Lady Cressida made that speech to him Lord Mannering felt himself to be a brute indeed!

There was so much truth in what she said—so infinitely more truth, indeed, than she at all suspected—that he was smitten to the heart with remorse and repentance.

Ida on, perhaps, what might prove to be her deathbed—and he, by his neglect and unkindness, had been the cause of her illness! It was enough to smite the stoniest heart with remorse—and Florian's was of the tenderest. All he could do was to stammer confusedly,—

"What can I do—what can I do for her?"

"Make it up to her when she gets well—if it pleases God to restore her to life," said Lady Cressida, fervently, pressing his hand.

Florian bent his head in assent. He could not speak. Sorry as he was for Ida—and he was very sorry for her—and guilty as he felt himself to be with regard to her—he could not forget Hester; nor could he, for the life of him, help thinking that if poor Ida were not to get better, how very much all his troubles would be smoothed away, and what a solution of his difficulties it would be! It was horribly wicked, of course, to let such a thought even flash through his mind, and he felt shocked and horrified at himself for it; but, nevertheless, the thought came in spite of himself, and recurred to him again and again throughout the long watches of that dreary night.

Nobody went to bed. Mannering could do no good; but it would have looked heartless if he had gone away, so he stayed, and they all sat up the whole night long in the drawing-room; and dreary enough it was. Every hour a report came down from the sick-room—sometimes a shade better, but generally there was no change in the state of the patient. Then Lady Cressida would break out into tears afresh, and Mr. Greythorne would groan aloud, and Lord Mannering did his best to comfort them; but he felt that he would have given a thousand pounds gladly to have had moral courage enough to get up and go away out of the house.

But he could not do it. Then, early in the morning, just as the dim gray light came creeping through the shutters, down came Dr. A—— in person, and told them that Ida had fallen into a deep sleep.

"If we can keep up her strength we shall pull her through now," he said.

So the verdict had gone forth that she was to live and not die.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT MR. GREYTHORNE THOUGHT OF IT.

Dick Forrester was mercifully spared the knowledge of Ida's illness until she was pronounced to be out of danger. It was only when she was so far better that Lord Mannering, not being able to be of the slightest use, felt that he could with decency think of going back to Wilmerton, and had made up his mind to return thither the following day, that Dick called at the door of Eaton Square for the first time to make anxious and terrified inquiries after her.

As he stood at the open hall door, not content with the footman's stereotyped answer, and cross-questioning him in order to extract more minute information from him, it chanced that Mr. Greythorne crossed the hall from the dining-room on his way to his study, and glancing towards the open door, recognized the inquirer.

"Hallo! is that you, Dick Forrester? I did not see who it was at first. You have come for news of my poor little girl? She is better, thank God! Lady Cressida is upstairs with her, or I daresay she would see you"—for Mr. Greythorne was, of course, in complete ignorance of the manner in which his wife had treated Dick. "Come into my study for a minute if you have time."

Dick thankfully accepted the invitation, and went in. Mr. Greythorne, although he had not troubled his head much about the Forresters, was always pleasant and friendly to any of them he met by chance. He was also not sorry to find somebody to talk to, for a sick house is a dismal place for a man who is no earthly use in it; and now the first painful excitement of Ida's illness was over, her father felt it dull to be doomed to eat his breakfast and dinner alone, because Lady Cressida was always in Ida's room.

He entered forthwith into a long account of his daughter's illness, to which Dick listened with a breathless interest and a face of deepest concern.

"Ah, you were always friends as children!" said Mr. Greythorne. "I am sure you are sorry for her. But the singular thing to me is what on earth can have brought on this illness; it puzzles me entirely. The doctors keep on saying that it must have been some trouble of the mind, but, of course, as her mother says, that must be all rubbish, because she couldn't have had any trouble that we could not have known about; and yet even now she doesn't seem herself at all, but lies quite still and silent, never smiling nor speaking, only she heaves such deep, long sighs, that it makes me quite miserable to hear her—indeed, I can't bear to be in the room. I never stay more than a minute or two; but it really does seem as if they were right, and she had something weighing on her mind."

"Mr. Greythorne, I think I can tell you what your daughter's trouble is," said Dick.

The old gentleman stared at his visitor in surprise.

"Eh? What?" he said, pulling off his spectacles,

and rubbing them as though there had been something in them that prevented his seeing clearly as well as hearing aright. "What did you say, Dick Forrester?"

"I said, sir, that I can tell you the cause of your daughter's illness, and the trouble that is preying upon her mind."

"I am quite astonished by what you say. How is it possible that you can know anything about my daughter?"

"Because, sir," answered Dick, boldly, "I love her with all my heart, and she loves me in return."

"Good Heavens!" was all that poor Mr. Greythorne could find to ejaculate.

At the first moment it seemed to him that young Forrester must have gone slightly out of his mind; and then he suddenly recollected what he had hitherto forgotten—that little episode which had occasioned their hasty move from Strathendale to London, when Ida had gone over to The Cottage at ten o'clock at night, and Lady Cressida had been so terribly upset about it, and had been so anxious to hush up the whole affair. Poor Mr. Greythorne felt as if, by so imprudently asking the young man into the house, he might very likely have brought a hornets' nest about his ears. The situation, he felt, was more than he could manage single-handed.

"I think perhaps I had better send for her ladyship," he said nervously, moving towards the bell-handle.

But Dick jumped up, and stopped his ringing it.

"Pray do not send for Lady Cressida, Mr. Greythorne," he said earnestly. "She and I have already

talked this matter over fully, and she will have nothing to say to me."

"Then, Mr. Forrester," answered Mr. Greythorne, with dignity, "I do not see what you can expect me to say to you."

"No. If it were only myself I would bear my disappointment like a man, and go my way and trouble you no further; but if Ida loves me—if her happiness is involved—if her affection for me is so great that she is ill to within a danger of her life—how, then, can I be expected to hold my tongue?"

"Mr. Forrester," answered Mr. Greythorne, with some warmth, "I do not believe that my daughter loves you—it is inconceivable—impossible; do you not know that she is shortly to be married to Lord Mannering?"

"I know it too well, sir; and I also know that if the poor child dared to break off her engagement, she would do so!"

Mr. Greythorne looked infinitely distressed.

"Do you know that what you are saying involves a very serious accusation against Lady Cressida?—if what you are telling me has any truth in it, it is tantamount to an imputation that my wife is forcing Ida into a marriage which is repugnant to her."

"If you will inquire into the matter, you will find, sir, that what I say is true. Speak to Ida alone, without her mother, and ask her if it is not true that she loves me!"

"Dear—dear—dear!" was all that Mr. Greythorne could find to say.

He was a peace-loving man, desiring quietness and

tranquillity, and hating everything that was disturbing and unpleasant. It was eminently disagreeable to him to have been let in for a scene of this kind, and be told such astonishing and upsetting things. But for all that, below the surface of his indolence and his love of a quiet life; above all things, there lay a deeply-rooted affection to his only child.

Much as he, as well as her mother, had desired her to marry well—and sincerely as he approved of the man she was engaged to—no considerations of earthly advantages, neither of rank nor of wealth, would have ever induced him to sacrifice his child's happiness in order to carry out an ambitious marriage in her person. In that respect Mr. Greythorne loved his daughter, not selfishly, as her mother did, but with a disinterested and unselfish affection.

He was genuinely shocked and horrified by what Dick Forrester had said to him—that any one should even imagine that Ida was being forced to marry a man she did not like was horrible to think of! Ida, his spoiled darling—the child whose slightest whim had been granted from her babyhood upwards—that anybody could suppose him capable of ruining the whole happiness of her life was most distressing to his affection as a father, and to his *amour propre* as a man of a kindly and humane disposition. He could not but believe that young Forrester must have overstated the case.

"I think, Mr. Forrester," he said very gravely, the seriousness of their conversation having induced him to drop the familiarity of "Dick"—"I cannot help thinking that you have misunderstood the subject. Of

course, if you made a proposal to Lady Cressida for my daughter's hand, it is but natural that she should have declined it. We have other views for our daughter; and even were this not so, you are a poor man, and have no means of supporting a wife."

"I have lately obtained employment, Mr. Greythorne, which, were you to help Ida in any way, would enable me to marry," interrupted Dick, respectfully, for he was determined to state the whole of his case now that he had his opportunity.

"Well—well," said Mr. Greythorne, waving his hand rather impatiently, "that may be. I am glad for your father's sake you have found something to do; still, even so, it can hardly be said that you are in a suitable position to marry my daughter. Lady Cressida has been perfectly right in making this clear to you. I can quite understand that you have been disappointed and unhappy, and if, in the warmth of your feelings, you have fancied—"

"I have fancied nothing!" cried Dick, interrupting him, hotly: "neither have I considered my own feelings! It is Ida whom I have thought of; and it is *her* feelings, and not my own, which have induced me to re-open this subject to you."

"Come—come, my young friend; a girl's fancy—her naturally affectionate remembrance of the playfellow of her childhood."

"Was it a girl's fancy, do you think, Mr Greythorne," answered Dick, earnestly, "or the mere remembrance of a childish playmate, which brought your daughter across the Lennan alone and unprotected at the dead of night in the middle of a storm of rain and wind—

that induced her to fight her way through the swollen waters that she might sink down faint and exhausted and wet to the skin at my feet? What do you suppose brought her there? was *that* a mere fancy, or was it not rather the strong and passionate love of an earnest, true-hearted woman for the man whom, in her despair, she imagined she should never see again?"

He spoke earnestly and solemnly; his dark, handsome face gleamed with the strength of his cause and the intensity of his pleading; his very voice shook with a nameless emotion.

Mr. Greythorne was impressed. He had, of course, heard about Ida's escapade upon that unlucky night—but he had heard about it from Lady Cressida's lips; and somehow the story had been very differently told him, and had produced upon him a very slender impression, as related by her, to what it did now.

Told by Dick Forrester—the man for whose sake Ida had been guilty of that breach of every conventional propriety of life—the tale of her nocturnal adventure assumed a far more serious and important aspect in his estimation.

All at once a veil seemed lifted from his eyes; he remembered many little things that hitherto had escaped his notice. Ida's pallor, her loss of spirit and of appetite, her frequent tears, which he himself had more than once surprised; all this began to take a new meaning and a new importance; and if Dick Forrester's story was indeed a true one, what part, then, had his wife played in all this?

Poor Mr. Greythorne felt bewildered and distressed beyond measure.

"Good Heavens!" he said, rubbing his hand nervously over his bald head, "what on earth am I to do about all this?"

"Speak to Ida yourself, sir, as soon as she is able to bear it, and learn the truth from her own lips, and do not mention the subject to Lady Cressida until you have done so."

"No; perhaps that will be best."

"If what I have said to you is false, then I am content to go my way and to trouble you and your family no more; but if you find that I have spoken the truth, and that your daughter is attached to me, and would give anything to be able to break off her present engagement, then I think I need not suggest to you what should be your right course of action."

Just then an upstairs bell rang violently.

"It is Lady Cressida," said Mr. Greythorne, nervously. "I think you had better go—good-by, Dick, good-by; you have done right in speaking to me, of course—leave me your card, my boy, with your address, and I will write to you; there, that's right, now go quickly!"

He hurried his visitor away, fearful lest his wife should discover him.

Left alone, the poor gentleman considered his position somewhat ruefully.

"He has left me a terrible business!" he said to himself, dejectedly. "Of course it is my duty to sift the whole thing to the bottom for Ida's sake; but if it should turn out to be true—which I pray Heaven may not be the case—it will be a precious awkward matter to get her out of this engagement; and as to my lady,

oh !" and he flung up his hands in a despair that would have been comic to an eye-witness had one been present, " I had rather face a mad bull than my lady in one of her tantrums."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ELOPEMENT.

On the day following that on which Lord Mannering had been hastily summoned up to town by Ida's illness, Hester Forrester had received a letter by post from "John Florian," telling her that important business had called him unexpectedly to London, and that he must defer until his return her answer to the request he had made of her.

Hester shook her head somewhat sorrowfully over this note; she was well determined never to consent to marry him in such a manner as he had proposed, but she hoped that her own firmness in the matter would rather increase his respect and esteem for her than diminish in any way his affection.

A few days went by, and then the morning post brought her two letters. One was from her brother, asking her if she would come up to London for a couple of nights: one of Mrs. Wright's children was away, and Hester was welcome to her room, and Dick seemed sorely in need of his sister's sympathy and advice. He gave her a long account of Ida's illness, and his own interview with her father, and he entreated her to come up that they might talk over everything together. Now, if ever, wrote Dick, he stood in need of his sister's good sense and of her clear-sighted way of

regarding things. One false step at this crisis of his life might cost him his whole happiness ; whereas, by her counsel and her wise suggestions, she might enable him to win the woman who was the very desire of his heart.

It was impossible for Hester to disregard such a letter, or to refuse to grant her brother's request. But then, on the other hand, the same post brought her a letter from her lover, telling her that he would be at home on the morrow, and would await her under the apple tree in the orchard at the usual hour. But never in her whole life had Hester Forrester considered her own happiness or her own pleasure before her family ties and the duty which she owed to other people. It was quite clear to her what she ought to do. She took both letters in her hand, and went up to Gertrude's room. Gertrude always breakfasted in bed ; she had not yet risen.

"I have had a letter from my brother," began Hester ; and she was not quite guiltless, at the bottom of her heart, of a hope that Gertrude might perhaps refuse to her the permission to go up to London, and thus enable her to see her lover with a clear conscience. "He wants me to go up to town for a couple of days. He is rather in trouble, poor boy. Could you spare me, Gertrude ?"

Gertrude Tracy glanced at the letters in her companion's hand, and her quick eye recognized a handwriting upon the second envelope which years ago had been tolerably familiar to her—it was long—long since she had seen it ; but there is one thing a woman never forgets and that is the handwriting of the man she

has once loved. Gertrude knew it in a minute; as she paused before replying, Hester hastened to say,—

"Of course I will not think of going if you do not like it, dear," and there was, unconsciously, a certain amount of eagerness in the remark which betrayed the undercurrent of thought in her mind to Gertrude's keen understanding.

"She is not eager to go to her brother, because *he* is coming back," she said to herself. "Now, if ever, is my chance!" Then she said aloud, quite cordially and eagerly,—

"My dear Hester, I am *delighted* that you should go. Pray write to your brother and say that you will be with him to-morrow—for two days, or three, or four, if you like it. I am only too glad that you should be of use to him, and also have so pleasant a little change up to town."

So Hester had no other choice. She wrote to her brother and told him she would go up to Mrs. Wright's by a morning train; and then she took up her pen again, and, with some hesitation, she wrote another letter also, which she began, "My dearest John." She told him that for two days longer he must wait without seeing her, as she had promised to go up to London to see her brother, but that she would meet him on the third evening at their usual meeting-place. She addressed this letter to the London club from which he had written to her; but as she directed it to "John Florian, Esq.," it lay for many weeks unclaimed in the porter's desk, and then no such name having been ever known upon the club books, it went to the Dead Letter Office—was opened by the clerk in charge, and

no address or name being found save that of "Hester," it vanished forever and was seen no more.

Late that same afternoon Hester observed as the three ladies sat over their five-o'clock tea,—

"My brother tells me that Ida Greythorne has been very ill—Lady Cressida's daughter, Mrs. Tracy—but you do not know her, do you?"

"No, I never saw her but once when she was a baby. Ah! I heard in the village that she was ill," said Mrs. Tracy.

"In the village!" repeated Hester astonished; "how could such a thing be known here?"

"Oh! you forget that she is engaged to Lord Mannering, and Lord Wilmerton, down here, is his grandfather."

"Oh! yes, to be sure, I had forgotten;" and then, after a pause, she added, "but I suppose Lord Mannering himself is seldom down here?"

It was on the tip of Mrs. Tracy's tongue to say that Lord Mannering had been here for some time, and had only just gone up to town, presumably on account of Miss Greythorne's illness; but over the top of Hester's head, as she stooped over her needlework, Gertrude Tracy telegraphed a sign to her mother to be silent. Mrs. Tracy was not exactly in her daughter's secrets, but she was aware that some plans of her own were brewing with regard to Lord Mannering, and she discreetly held her tongue, whilst Gertrude remarked unconcernedly,—

"Oh, no! he is in London, of course. I think they are to be married soon—unless this illness delays it."

Hester thought of her brother, and wondered wheth-

er Ida's marriage to Lord Mannering was ever likely to come off at all. She felt that she should know more about it when she had seen Dick, and heard all that he had to tell her—meanwhile, of course, she said nothing to the Tracys—and Lord Mannering was a person in whom she took but a very feeble interest—she did not allude to him again.

The following morning she took her departure to London by an early train, and about half-way to town an express down-train—had she but known it!—bore her lover swiftly past her on his return homewards.

That evening, at the accustomed hour, Florian stood alone under the apple tree, awaiting with unusual impatience the appearance of the woman he loved. He longed to see her intensely; the days of absence from her had been hard to bear, and had but increased his affection and his desire to carry her away with him, and to make her his own. Now that Ida was better, and that his conscience was more at rest concerning her, it seemed to him that if he wished to break away from his engagement to her, and to fling every other consideration to the winds for the sake of Hester Forrester, now if ever, was the time to do it; and yet, knowing Hester as he did, he dreaded that her opposition to his schemes would be determined and unwavering. Her strong sense of right, her open and truthful disposition, and, above all, her intensely honest and innocent nature, would, he felt sure, induce her to resist his pleadings to the utmost. Should he be able to overcome her resistance? He could not tell. Only, if not, then he felt that in that case he must brave everything—exposure, disgrace, scandal; the

anger of his grandfather, and his too probably more substantially-expressed displeasure; everything, including her own disgust at the deception he had practised upon her—all must be risked sooner than that he could consent to lose her.

Meanwhile, she was long in coming to-night, and he sighed more than once impatiently and irritably at the delay.

Within the house a woman was wrapping herself hastily in Hester Forrester's long plaid cloak. She had found Hester's garden hat in her bedroom—a drooping, shady felt hat around which she had tied a thick veil.

"I am about the same height," she murmured to herself as she stood under the glimmer of the hall lamp.

Her mother came creeping out of the drawing-room after her. She looked at her in a bewildered and somewhat terrified manner.

"Oh, Gertrude, my dear! *Do* tell me what it is you are going to do?" she said pleadingly.

"Mother, I cannot tell you. Wait, and trust in me."

"But, my dear, are you sure you are not running a risk? Are you wise in what you are doing?"

"I don't know—I can't tell; but I am venturing everything. I may win and I may lose. You may not see me again, mother, to-night. I may go up to town—see, I have my bag."

"Oh, Gertrude! Take my advice and give it up. If it is Lord Mannering, I feel sure it is hopeless."

"Hush, mother, you don't understand. For years I have waited for such a chance as this. Think of it—revenge, ambition, love, all may be gratified by this one

bold stroke! I can't explain to you; if all goes well I will write. Have you got the letter for Lord Wilmerton?"

"Yes; I locked it safely in my davenport. When am I to post it?"

"To-morrow at five o'clock, if you have heard nothing from me, you may post it. Good-by, mother. Who knows that there may not be a Countess of Wilmerton in our family yet?"

She kissed her mother's cheek lightly, and went out into the darkness of the garden.

Five minutes later the impatient heart of the lonely lover in the orchard was gladdened by the sight of the darkly-cloaked and veiled figure that came swiftly across the long wet grass to meet him.

He sprang forward and caught her joyfully in his arms.

"My darling, my dearest!" he cried, kissing the veiled face that was bent a little away from him. "How glad I am to be with you once more! How long the days have been without you! Are you not glad that I am back again, my own?"

She murmured an inarticulate assent. Nothing further could be expected of a young woman under the circumstances. For the first few minutes rapturous words of love and passionate kisses, answered by vague murmurs and dumb caresses, was all that took place between them; then suddenly, in hot, eager words, Florian began to plead for her consent to go up to town with him. He urged her by her love and her faith in him; he hinted at family complications and unexplainable difficulties, which could alone be smoothed away

by a marriage of this kind; and he implored her in every strain and in every form of language to yield to his entreaties. For some time he talked alone, eagerly and breathlessly; then suddenly he ceased to speak, and what was his intense surprise when, instead of the opposition and the high moral objections he had expected—instead of the calm superiority of her arguments, and the possible indignation which he had anticipated—the woman whom he held to his heart put up her face to his and whispered,—

"Yes, I am coming with you. I have brought my things—all ready to go to-night!"

Now such is the contrariety of human nature that Lord Mannering was positively taken aback by this readiness to fall in with his views. For two or three moments, indeed, he experienced a shock of surprise that was not altogether of a pleasurable nature. This easy and willing consent was so utterly different from what he had expected, and so unlike the character which had seemed to him to belong to his Hester, that there was actually a feeling of revulsion in his mind. It was taking him so literally at his word—to go this very night, and to come all ready prepared! There was a want almost of modesty about it which offended his taste.

"It must be to-night or never!" she said, half conscious, perhaps, of the feeling in his mind, "for I think I am watched."

She spoke in a low whisper.

"Ah!" he said, "that horrid woman, Gertrude Tracy, probably—she is quite capable of playing the spy! Come, then, darling, let us go."

He, of course, had not been at all prepared for an immediate flight, but when a lady makes the advances it is not for a true lover to draw back. Besides, he had rooms in town, and he thought he could make out some plan for her night's lodging as they went along; so he gave her his arm, and they started at a brisk walk across the fields towards the railway station, and not a suspicion of the truth entered for one moment into his mind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEWS IN EATON SQUARE.

Hester was in London at her sister's house in Kensington. It was the first time she had ever stayed with her, and she felt it very strange to be there as a visitor, and almost, indeed, as a stranger. She had seen very little of Mrs. Wright, and had not much in common with her; and as to her brother-in-law, he was almost unknown to her. She was glad, of course, to see the children and to make friends with them; but there were so many of them, and they were all so nearly of a size, that she felt hopelessly confused as to their names, and could not for the life of her tell which from which. As to the little people themselves, they clustered about her knees with wide-open eyes and mouths, staring at her after the fixed and unblushing manner of small children generally, and could in no way be induced either to claim kindred with her or to enter into any conversation.

But, of course, the main object of her visit was Dick, and with Dick she was unfeignedly glad to be. He had just secured bachelor quarters for himself nearer to his work and meditated moving into them the following week. Hester was of the greatest use to him in arranging his rooms, and in helping him to make sundry purchases which were essential to his comfort.

The brother and sister walked about London, talking incessantly, and were thoroughly happy together. Dick had to tell Hester all about Ida—her illness and his own reviving hopes concerning her—for Dick was full of hope.

"Her father is on my side now. I have opened his eyes to the truth—you will see that he will not allow the matter to drop—and when the poor darling finds that he takes her side, she will have the courage to make a stand and to resist her mother. Her spirit had been quite broken, poor child, and she was too weak bodily to be able to be brave."

It will be seen that Dick had now completely forgiven the timidity and the vacillation upon which he had been so severe at the time.

It was Hester's advice to him to remain perfectly inactive for the present, and to await the march of events. Nothing certainly could be done until Ida became stronger, for her father refused to risk excitement by mentioning any agitating subject to her until she should be well enough to bear it. Every morning Dick, by Mr. Greythorne's special permission, called at Eaton Square for news of the invalid. He came at the same hour, and was shown straight into Mr. Greythorne's study; and Lady Cressida, who had not yet left her room, was totally unaware of these daily visits. Mr. Greythorne had never yet dared to divulge to his wife his secret partisanship with "that young Forrester."

He was putting off that evil moment until such time as he should learn the whole truth from his daughter's own lips. Then, as he daily took care to inform Dick,

should Ida prefer to keep her engagement to Lord Mannering, nothing farther could be done in the matter, and he, Dick, must be content to make his bow and take his departure. Dick was quite ready to agree to this.

Mr. Greythorne could not help owning to himself that he liked the young man, personally, very much—he had far more in common with him, indeed, than the noble son-in-law which his wife had found for him; and should Ida declare herself in favor of young Forrester, Mr. Greythorne was well determined that she should have him. There would be a row, of course; but meanwhile there was no occasion to bring on the row before its time, and to cause the connubial vials of wrath to be outpoured on his head, when possibly there might be no occasion at all for any such outpouring.

So he held his tongue, and received Dick Forrester every morning in his study for five minutes, reported Ida's progress to him, and preached to him daily the same text, namely, that he must be patient.

On the third morning of Hester's visit to Mrs. Wright—the morning, indeed, of the day on which she was to go back to the Grange, to which she intended to return by an afternoon train—Dick was, as usual, in Mr. Greythorne's study, receiving from that gentleman an account of Ida's health. Suddenly there was a commotion outside in the hall. The study windows opened into the back yard, so neither gentlemen had witnessed the violent dashing up of a hansom to the front door; but they were conscious that somebody had come into the house and was talking very loudly in the hall.

"Mr. Greythorne is particularly engaged just now, sir," said the butler's voice, respectfully.

"What do I care, you fool, whether he is engaged or not! I tell you if he is in his bed I must see him, and that instantly! I come upon business of the utmost importance. Go and tell him so at once!"

"Great Heavens! it is Lord Wilmerton!" exclaimed Mr. Greythorne, recognizing the voice. He flung open the study door, and there hobbled in a very angry old gentleman with a gouty foot, supporting himself upon two crutch-sticks.

"My dear lord, who would have thought of seeing you at this hour in the morning? Pray come in!" began Mr. Greythorne, with polite cordiality.

But the earl was far too angry and too excited for civility.

"Don't waste time, sir, with making pretty speeches to me! I am sorry to say I have come to you with very bad news, and your ass of a butler has kept me for nearly five minutes at the door before he would let me in! A very terrible thing has happened, Mr. Greythorne!"

Lord Wilmerton was so much absorbed in his news, and so excited by his encounter with the butler, that he did not even perceive that a stranger was present.

Dick would have left the room, but Mr. Greythorne made him a sign to stay, and he remained standing in a corner, awaiting what was to come.

"I am sure I am very sorry, Lord Wilmerton, that my man should have been guilty of any incivility to you. If you had given your name—"

"What does it signify?" cried the old man, irascibly.

"Pray don't waste time on civilities, when I've got a business like this to deal with! I have a very shocking thing to tell you, Mr. Greythorne!"

Mr. Greythorne murmured a few words indicative of regret and condolence, but he did not feel profoundly interested in Lord Wilmerton's news. It did not strike him that anything he could say would be personally very exciting to himself.

The old man went on, striking his crutch-stick angrily on the carpet as he spoke.

"That scoundrel of a grandson of mine has run away with a low, underbred, double-faced minx of a girl, who lives at my park gates, and who has been setting her cap at him for the last ten years, just as her mother set hers at me five years before that!"

Mr. Greythorne literally jumped in his chair with astonishment, whilst Dick uttered an exclamation of surprise in his corner.

"Impossible, Lord Wilmerton!" cried Mr. Greythorne, quite thunderstruck.

That any man should have offered such an insult to his child was certainly a great shock to him.

"It's possible enough—young villain! Look at the letter I got at seven o'clock this morning from the wretched woman herself. I got up instantly, and came off by the first train. But the deed must have been done yesterday, and it is too late to save him from destruction; and then I felt, Mr. Greythorne, that it was only due to you and to your daughter that I should come to you instantly, and acquaint you with the facts—with, I may say truly, the *disgraceful* facts."

Mr. Greythorne was reading the note, which the earl had handed to him. It ran as follows:—

"My Lord,—By the time you get this letter I shall have been married for twelve hours to Lord Mannering. You have scorned and despised me all my life, just as you scorned and despised my mother. You once came between me and your grandson, whom I loved, and you spoiled my life for me. I have waited many years, and at last I have it in my power to pay you back for the cruelty and the injustice you dealt to me. May this be a lesson to you never to make an enemy of a clever woman who has the will and the power to be revenged.

"Gertrude Tracy."

"Dear me—dear me!" said Mr. Greythorne, rubbing his bald head nervously, as was his wont in moments of perplexity. "This is a very bad business, my lord! I suppose they are married fast enough by now?"

"Believe me, Mr. Greythorne," said the earl, with some feeling, "I am deeply sorry for the insult that my family has thus unintentionally offered to yours."

"I am sure you are, Lord Wilmerton," said Mr. Grdythorne, holding out his hand.

"It will, I fear, be a great blow to Lady Cressida and to Miss Greythorne."

"It will be a great blow to Lady Cressida," assented Mr. Greythorne, gravely, leaving out, perhaps intentionally, his daughter's name.

"I am sincerely sorry for the trouble I am bringing upon your family."

"Pray do not think of that, my lord! Your own

trouble, and the disappointment you must naturally feel in your grandson command my deepest sympathy."

"I think this distressing event should be communicated to your daughter as soon as possible," said the earl.

"I think so too," said Mr. Greythorne. "Can I do nothing to help you, Lord Wilmerton?"

"Nothing, thank you. I shall drive straight to my solicitor, and set him to work to trace this unhappy young man, and to find out where he has gone to with this miserable woman; and then you may be quite sure that I shall lose no time in giving him directions to prepare a new will."

Lord Wilmerton rose to depart, groaning considerably as he deposited his foot on to the ground.

"I am afraid your foot is very painful," said Mr. Greythorne, going to his visitor's assistance.

"It is, sir, very painful; but that is nothing to the pain at my heart, Mr. Greythorne, absolutely nothing!" and there was a quiver in the old man's voice. He looked ill too, and his face was pallid and drawn now that the excitement of his anger had abated.

"Pray have a glass of sherry and something to eat before you go," said Mr. Greythorne, looking at him with concern; "ring the bell, Dick."

"Nothing, thank you—not a thing—I couldn't swallow a mouthful—many thanks all the same," and with some difficulty the old man hobbled out into the hall and was helped into his hansom and driven off.

"It will kill him," said Mr. Greythorne, as he

watched him depart; "you mark my words: the shock will kill him; for all his anger, the poor old boy is wrapped up in his grandson."

"I should like to catch Lord Mannering, and give him a good horsewhipping!" cried Dick, savagely.

Mr. Greythorne laughed softly.

"I don't think you need do that, Dick; it strikes me that Lord Mannering has done you a very good turn indeed."

"Yes; that is true, sir," said Dick, smiling in his turn. "Who is the woman he has bolted with?"

"I really did not notice the name; the note was vulgar and impertinent in its tone, but I only just skimmed it through. Now, I pray Heaven that you are right, Dick, and that my girl does not break her heart over this false lover!"

"I don't think you will find that Ida will shed many tears over him," said Dick, gleefully. "All the same, he deserves a horsewhipping."

"But not from you, Dick, not from you!"

"No, perhaps not, sir," and then they both laughed.

There was no doubt at all about it that both Mr. Greythorne and his young guest, now that the first shock of surprise and indignation was over, were in the most exuberantly good spirits over Lord Mannering's elopement.

Dick had never known Mr. Greythorne so hilarious.

"Did you ring the bell, Dick, for the sherry?"

"No, sir; Lord Wilmerton stopped me."

"Then suppose you do so now."

"Indeed, I ought to be going to my work."

"Fiddlesticks! leave your work alone for to-day;

ring the bell. A bottle of the old brown sherry, Gibbs, and be quick about it. Now, my boy, I am going to drink your health and good luck to you; and I may tell you that this morning's business has taught me that an honest man, who loves my girl heartily and truly, is a better match for her than a viscount with an earl's coronet before him, who can throw over the sweetest and best girl in England for a vulgar brute of a woman who could write such a letter as the one I just read."

A quarter of an hour later, Lady Cressida, coming downstairs, heard voices in her husband's study. She opened the door, and to her amazement and consternation beheld the best brown sherry on the table, and Mr. Greythorne and Dick Forrester on either side of it, discussing its rapidly-diminishing contents.

Both gentlemen jumped up somewhat confusedly at her entrance, and, truth to say, they both of them felt uncommonly guilty; a bottle of brown sherry at eleven o'clock in the morning certainly required some adequate excuse and explanation.

"*Mr. Forrester!*" exclaimed Lady Cressida, turning to him with an expression of infinite disgust and displeasure; "I am really extremely surprised to see that you have ventured to enter this house again!"

"Dick is here by my desire, my lady," said Mr. Greythorne, stoutly; "and I hope he will very often be here again."

"Upon my word, you seem to be making very merry this morning, Mr. Greythorne!" replied Lady Cressida, scornfully.

"My dear, when you hear what has happened, al-

though, indeed, I am afraid you will be very much distressed at first—"

"Is that why you are drinking sherry?" inquired her ladyship, with polite disdain.

"I think you had better go, Dick," said Mr. Greythorne, who foresaw a row.

"Certainly Mr. Forrester had better go," assented Lady Cressida.

And Dick made his escape as speedily as possible.

"And now, Tom," said Lady Cressida, turning to her husband, as the door closed upon him, "now that young man—whom I am surprised at your encouraging here—is gone, pray let me know what it is all about?"

"My dear," said Mr. Greythorne, clearing his throat, and feeling that whatever the storm might be, the facts of the case were incontrovertible. "My dear—a very serious thing has happened—Lord Wilmerton has been here to tell me that Lord Mannering has eloped with somebody else."

And then Lady Cressida went into hysterics.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BRIDE'S TOOTHACHE.

It is time to return to the fortunes of the fugitives. On their way between the Grange Orchard and the station, whilst clinging closely to her companion's arm, Gertrude Tracy said, still in the same whispered tones in which she had spoken before,—

"I cannot face the lights of the station—I might be recognized; and I must not go in the same carriage with you. I will wait outside until you bring me my ticket, and then you must go on and get into the train first, and I will get into another carriage."

This extraordinary caution did strike Lord Mannering as something peculiar in a woman who had been so ready to run away with him.

"That does not seem like my brave Hester!" he said, pressing her arm. "Are you frightened, my darling? You seem hardly able to speak."

"Yes; I am terribly frightened!" she murmured.

"Ah! it is that detestable woman, Gertrude Tracy, who has frightened you, I know!"

Gertrude made a mental registration of this second unflattering mention of her name, and swore to repay him the observation by-and by—with interest.

"Pray do as I ask you!" was all, however, that she said at present, returning the slight pressure upon her arm.

He could not do otherwise. Having consented to please him in the main thing, it was the least he could do to yield to her in the smaller details of the evening's adventure.

He left her standing in the shadow of the station wall whilst he went inside and got the tickets; then, when the train came up, he went on in front of her, opened the door of a first-class carriage for her, and jumped himself into the adjoining compartment.

In this manner, thanks to her thick veil and Hester's cloak, and to the hurry in which their entrance into the train was carried out, Lord Mannering had not once had the opportunity of looking at his companion's face. All he had seen of her was the knot of dark hair beneath her hat as the station lights gleamed for one instant upon it; and Gertrude's hair was nearly as dark as Hester's.

It was Miss Tracy's object that Lord Mannering should remain in ignorance of her identity until the following day; and by a great piece of good luck she was enabled to carry out this object successfully.

When they reached London, and Lord Mannering came to her carriage to help her out, she whispered to him that an old lady in the corner of her carriage, who had been fast asleep the whole way, was an acquaintance of Mrs. Tracy's, that she had been looking at her suspiciously, and, she felt sure, must have recognized her.

"Don't let her think you belong to me," she said. "I will run out quickly and jump into a four-wheeled cab, and you can follow me."

And she held up her hand to her face to shade it

from the old lady's observation—shading it also, at the same time, completely from him.

It is needless to say that the old lady in question was a perfect stranger to her, and had never taken the slightest notice of her, or even seemed aware of her presence.

By the time Florian joined her in the cab, Gertrude had extracted a woolen wrap from her bag, and had tied it over her head and round her face securely under her chin.

"My tooth aches so horribly!" she said in a choked voice in explanation. "Pray do not speak to me."

Now a toothache is not a romantic ailment, nor is it exactly a poetical or beautifying accompaniment to a couple of runaway lovers. Nevertheless, it is a substantial evil that commands a certain amount of sympathy, and must be treated with due respect and with serious consideration.

Lord Mannering thought it annoying, certainly, that his very first moments of bliss with his beloved should be marred by her having a toothache. Nevertheless, it was impossible to pooh-pooh such a painful complaint! He could only exhaust himself in tender expressions of regret and sorrow, and pillow her head upon his shoulder, which was effected in such a fashion that it was impossible for him to see more than the top of her hat and the white muffler, which scrubbed itself with an unpleasant persistency against his face.

"What can have given you such a horrible thing as toothache?" he exclaimed.

"Damp," ejaculated the lady, between her closed teeth.

It was not romantic, certainly; but then it must be very painful, and he was unfeignedly sorry for her.

"I am taking you to a very nice, quiet family hotel in a back street, kept by a most respectable woman, whom I have known for many years," he explained to her by the way; "and to-morrow morning I will come there for you, and fetch you away to the nearest church. I shall not be able to come very early, because I have a great many things to arrange"—he had, in fact, the license to procure and the clergyman to secure—"but I will be with you by eleven, if possible."

When the cab stopped at the door of this hotel, Gertrude whispered—

"Don't come out with me; I should die of shame!"

And Lord Mannering, who had taken the precaution of telegraphing to the proprietors of the hotel from Wilmerton Station to secure a bedroom, agreed to her request, the more readily because he did not wish to reveal his rank to Hester until the next day; and he knew that the good lady who had known him for years would assuredly call him "my lord" half a dozen times within the first five minutes.

The lovers, therefore, if such they can be called—parted within the shadow of the cab; the lady and her bag making a rapid dash into the hotel, whilst the gentleman continued his way in the same vehicle to his own rooms in Jermyn Street.

So far all had gone well and prospered with Gertrude Tracy's plans. Who can say with what relief, in the solitude of her bedroom that night, she flung

aside her muffling wraps, and laughed aloud over her own cleverness in getting up that convenient tooth-ache!

"Mannering was always a fool," she said to herself. "Fancy his being taken in so easily! He is as green as grass and as innocent as a baby; he never had a suspicion from beginning to end. Now let me see what is to be done next. If I can get him thoroughly to compromise me, his honor will be involved, and he will have to make me his wife even if he leaves me at the church door. I must think over the next step."

She sat down in front of the dressing-table, and leaning her chin upon her hands, remained wrapped in thought, looking fixedly all the while at her own image in the glass.

"Let me see—the letter will not reach Lord Wilmerton till the morning after next; the alarm will not be given to-morrow. It is running it rather close, certainly—the marriage could hardly be before half-past ten; but still I think it would be time enough, and it will be making assurance doubly sure. After *two* nights in town, he could hardly have the face to throw me over. Yes, I think I will risk it."

Great was Lord Mannering's dismay and disgust upon his arrival, in hot haste, at a quarter-past eleven the following morning, after having made untold efforts to get a license, to interview the clergyman, to hunt up an old schoolfellow to come and give his bride away, and to make every arrangement to carry out his marriage that morning—great, therefore, was his consequent disgust when Mrs. Jones, the landlady, came

down into the coffee-room, and informed him that the lady was so bad with her tooth that she could not possibly leave her bed.

"Poor dear, she won't even see me, my lord," said good Mrs. Jones, in great tribulation; "and Mary—that's the chamber-maid—just took her in a cup of tea, and she was a-hiding her head under the bedclothes, and a-groaning and a-moaning with the pain ever so! I went to the door just now, and it was locked, and she wouldn't let me in; and she called out to me to tell you she was that sorry she didn't know what to do, but her face was swollen up like a water-melon—that were her very expression—'like a water-melon, Mary,' says she; and she couldn't come down or show herself in any way, she was such a figure, and so mad with the pain, which I knows what it is, my lord, having had it myself mortal bad—if you will excuse me for mentioning it—and the poor young lady have sent for laudanum, and creosote, and Bunter's Nervine, and and a sight more things, from the chemist, and she has got a hot flannel to her face, and we was to give you her love, my lord, and say, if you wouldn't mind waiting till to-morrow—she knows as it will go off by then, these attacks always do—and she'll be ready by ten o'clock to-morrow morning for you."

What was a man to do! Lord Mannering felt half wild with disappointment and vexation to have the cup of happiness so near to his lips and yet to be unable to taste of it—to have everything settled, and then to have everything deferred—all this was more almost than mortal man could stand with patience and equanimity! But, then, how was a man to drag a poor

woman in agonies of pain out of her bed to be married; and what sort of figure would he make in church by the side of a bride whose face—to use her own words—was distended like a water-melon!

Disappointed and angry, and maddened as he felt, there was clearly no other course left to him than to submit to what was plainly inevitable. There was, moreover, a great deal for him to do. He had to go to the clergyman's house to inform him of the alteration of the day and to fix the ceremony for half-past ten the following morning. Then he had to go to the church and hunt out the clerk upon the same errand. The clerk grinned, and evidently considered him a curiously-changeable man; and, indeed, he felt himself to be in an exceedingly foolish position. Then he had to look up his friend and explain at some length the whole business to him.

The friend simply laughed outright in his face.

"My dear fellow, I'd have had her out—toothache or no toothache!"

"But she says her face is like a water-melon!" said Lord Mannering, irritably, and then the friend laughed again, and the laughter was eminently unpleasant to him.

All this made him thoroughly out of temper. He went back to the family hotel in a very bad humor indeed. If the truth were confessed, he began to feel thoroughly sick of the whole business, and to wish he had never been so foolish as to run away with Hester Forrester. There was no getting out of it now, of course; but still he wished he had let things take their course.

"It is an odd thing," he said to himself, as he looked out dismally over the gloomy wire-blind of the coffee-room window into the sloppy street without—"it is an odd thing, that ever since last night, when I first met her in the orchard, she has seemed quite an altered woman. She is totally different from what I had imagined her to be. Of course I love her dearly; but still the whole charm of the girl seems to be gone. I wonder whether it is my fault, and if it is really true than I can never be constant to one woman for three months together! I did think, too, that Hester had fixed my heart forever, and now I feel half tired of her already!"

And then he fell to reproaching himself vehemently for his disloyal thoughts towards her. With a vigorous effort he recalled all their past acquaintance; he thought over his first meeting with her by the Lennan Water, and of all his subsequent interviews with her; he brought back his mind forcibly to her beauty and her sweetness, and to the indescribable charms which her presence had always exercised over him, and then he told himself that she was the dearest and the best of women, and that he was the luckiest fellow upon earth. After that he came back to his former reflection, and caught himself saying, over and over again,—

"She seems altogether changed; her whole manner is different; her very voice seems altered—and that interminable whispering worries me to death."

He did not leave the hotel all day; he was afraid to walk about the streets by daylight, lest Mr. Greythorne should meet him and ask him to Eaton Square—in

which case the last dilemma would be worse than the first; so he stayed indoors, sending up frequent inquiries to his lady-love's room, and receiving thence, as the day wore on, more hopeful reports.

"The pain was less—the swelling was abating," said Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones, of course, guessed the condition of things, and was full of sly winks and hints, and also of polite sympathy and condolence for "my lord's disappointment."

"The poor dear young lady will be all right to-morrow, my lord," she said reassuringly, as she brought in the chop for her aristocratic customer's solitary dinner with her own hands; "and her beauty, pretty dear, won't be a bit spiled for her wedding!"

After "my lord" had finished his dinner, and received a final message that the lady would be quite ready for him at ten o'clock on the morrow, he took his departure, and went back to his own rooms in Jermyn Street.

By a quarter to ten on the following morning he was at the family hotel Mrs. Jones ushered him into her own private sitting-room in a perfect flutter of excitement.

"She is quite well this morning—all the pain and swelling gone—and she has sent out for a new mantle and a white bonnet; and oh, lor'! she do look nice! You wait in here, my lord, and I'll go and tell her you are ready for her."

Mrs. Jones went away, and there was about five minutes' delay. Florian felt quite happy again, and eagerly waited her arrival. At last everything, he

thought, was settled, and Hester would be his own within an hour.

A rustle of a dress along the passage—the door opened behind him—he sprang from his chair with outstretched hands and a beaming face, and encountered—Gertrude Tracy!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GERTRUDE TRACY'S CARDS.

For the first few moments Lord Mannering was so thoroughly amazed by the unexpected appearance of Gertrude Tracy that he did not in the least understand what was the real state of the case. His only perplexity was how on earth she had come there; and he could only imagine that she must have discovered Hester's flight with him and have tracked her to the hotel.

"Good Heavens! Gertrude Tracy!" he cried. "How in the world did you come here?"

"Did not you yourself bring me, Lord Mannering?" said Miss Tracy, smiling.

But it was not a pleasant smile.

"I don't understand you. What do you mean? Have you seen Hester, then?"

"Hester! No; I have not seen her, nor do I want to see her! Oh, Lord Mannering, is it possible that you have not guessed the truth?"

"The truth! What truth?" he gasped, backing away involuntarily from her as she advanced a few paces nearer to him.

A dark scowl flashed for one instant across her features as she marked the unflattering action; but, with a strong effort of control, she forced herself to smile at him sweetly and tenderly.

"Did you not guess that it was I, your old love —your Gertrude of long-past years of happiness, Florian—whom you took away with you from the Grange, and whom you brought here with you? Did your heart not tell you, when you pressed me so closely to you, who it was whom you held in your arms?"

"Good God!" he murmured in a choked voice.

"Oh, Florian," she cried, still softly and lovingly, "do not turn away from me like that. Is the love of years to go for nothing? the devotion of a lifetime to be flung away? Believe me, no other woman on earth will ever love you so constantly and truly, or make you so good a wife; and now that our lot is irrevocably cast together—"

"*What?*"

He had listened silently until now, feeling too utterly bewildered and upset by the revelation of her presence to be able to answer her; but her last words aroused him fully to anger and indignation.

"*What?*" he thundered forth again furiously, and then burst into a shout of derisive laughter.

Gertrude listened to him in silence. She turned very pale, and the whole expression of her face altered. The affectation of love and devotion, which had been the first card in her hand, had not answered—it was time to play another. She had plenty more in readiness.

"Why do you laugh?" she said quietly. "Does anything amuse you?"

"Yes; the idea that *you* fancy you can become my wife!" he answered derisively.

"There is no fancying about it," she answered mean-

ingly. "You have so far compromised yourself and me, that there is nothing else left for you to do. You have brought me here alone in the face of the people of this hotel; I have stayed for two nights in London under your protection; you have bought a license, and engaged a clergyman to perform the ceremony; there is not a person in this house, from the landlady down to the chambermaid, who does not know that you intend to marry me within an hour; and the very carriage you have engaged to take me to the church is now at the door. It is *impossible*, if you are a gentleman and a man of honor, that you can fail in keeping the engagement you have made! If you were to desert me now, you would be a blackguard, for you would ruin me forever! In the sight of all honest and decent women my character and my reputation would be destroyed!"

For a moment he was almost staggered by her arguments. It was true, as she said, that he had brought her to the hotel, and kept her there for two days at his expense; and it was true that no one had doubted that he intended to marry her. Was he indeed bound to fulfil his intention? But, after one instant of hesitation, his courage and his common sense returned to him; he told himself, indignantly, that a free man was not to be tricked into marrying a designing woman by a cunningly-planned deception of this kind; nor could the vows which he had made to one woman be taken to hold good when spoken to another by mistake.

And yet there was something so bold and so ingenious, and at the same time so clever, about the whole plot of this unscrupulous woman to trick him into

marrying her against his own will, that he could not help being struck with a certain amount of admiration for her.

"Your plans are cleverly laid, Miss Tracy," he exclaimed, "but, unfortunately, I am not quite such a weak fool as you seem to suppose; and I have yet to learn that in a free country a man can be tricked into marrying against his will, even when the trick is supplemented by violent words and an imputation against his honor. Pray understand, once for all, that I have not the slightest intention of making you my wife."

Then Gertrude turned over that card, and took up another.

She sank down upon a sofa, and buried her face in the cushions, and (apparently) burst into a flood of tears.

"Alas!—alas! what is to become of me?" she sobbed, in a voice choked by her emotion; "wretched, unfortunate girl that I am! I have sacrificed everything to my love; and now I am utterly undone! Oh! what is to become of me?"

"Pray don't cry like that!" said Lord Mannering, nervously; like all soft-hearted men, he could not bear to see a woman cry—and tears would melt him where threats would only turn him into stone. "There is no occasion for you to cry, it is very simple what will become of you. I shall take you back to your mother's house by the next train."

"She will not receive me!" almost shrieked Miss Tracy; "my reputation is gone!"

"Oh, bother your reputation!" cried his lordship, impatiently, and certainly somewhat irreverently, con-

sidering that he was speaking of that crown to a woman's glory that is supposed to be of more value to her than her life; "who do you suppose is to know anything about your reputation if you don't go blurting out the whole story yourself? For goodness' sake, my dear woman, stop crying, and look at things reasonably!"

"And how am I to look at things reasonably, when my whole life is ruined by you? when my own mother —the soul of purity, and goodness, and religion—"

"Ahem!" interrupted Lord Mannering, doubtfully; but Gertrude went on as if she hadn't heard him.

"When she demands an account of these two nights of absence, how shall I be able to give her one? She will turn me out of doors—and think of my fate then—with my delicate health I shall be homeless and desolate—an outcast—with a ruined reputation—oh! —oh!" and a tempest of sobs shook her from head to foot.

Lord Mannering heaved a sigh of despair.

"I do wish you would leave your reputation out of the question," he said, unconscious, probably, of the sarcasm he was uttering. "It really seems to me to be a matter of very trifling importance."

Miss Tracy cast up her eyes and hands in virtuous despair.

"A matter of trifling importance!" she repeated brokenly; "he says my reputation is a matter of trifling importance! Great Heavens! that there should be so much cruelty in a man's heart towards an unfortunate creature, whose existence he has blighted!"

And again she sank back upon her sofa cushions, and resumed her weeping. Upon the whole, she thought the tears were the best line of action she could follow.

Mannering paced up and down the room like a caged wild animal. He was very nearly at the end of his patience. The woman had played the most shameful trick upon him ; she had robbed him of his bride, and had nearly let him in for marrying herself ; and he knew that she had been actuated by no love of himself, but simply and purely by ambition and by a desire to revenge herself for certainly rather heartless conduct which he had been guilty of towards her more than ten years ago. He saw through her maneuvers perfectly ; and he had a pretty shrewd guess that her mother must be either wholly or partially in her daughter's confidence.

And yet for all that he was in sore perplexity about her, for he could not imagine how he was to rid himself of her. To take her back to her mother was easily said, but would perhaps be a difficult task to achieve. Meanwhile, every moment that he remained here alone with her was adding to the complications of the situation. The carriage that he had hired was certainly, as she had said, waiting now before the door ; the people of the house were all agog to see the bride and bridegroom go forth. Of course they had guessed that it was a matter of a runaway match, even had not Lord Mannering himself made assurance doubly sure by asking the landlady, as an old friend, to come with them and be one of the witnesses of the ceremony. The good lady was standing even now in the entrance hall, arrayed in her silk dress and her best Sunday

bonnet ; and it was safely to be affirmed that she was not likely to omit to state frequently and emphatically to her admiring household that it was to the wedding of Viscount Mannering that she had been bidden. The thing would be talked about and become known—would probably appear in the morrow's papers. So luscious a morsel of scandal was not likely to escape publicity ; there would be sensational paragraphs headed " A runaway marriage in high life," in big letters. Hester might—indeed, probably would—hear of it ; and then, great Heavens ! what would happen ?

All this flashed quickly, but with a terrible distinctness, through Mannering's brain. He felt as if he should go distracted. At any cost he must get her out of the house. When Miss Tracy repeated once more, in broken-hearted accents, that she was a wretched creature, and that he had blighted her existence, he felt more brutally disposed towards her than he had ever done towards anything belonging to the female sex in his life before.

" I have *not* blighted your existence," he cried, stopping short angrily before her. " It is false, and you know it is. You have played a disgraceful, shameful, dishonorable trick upon me, and if you were a man, somebody would horsewhip you ; as it is, you will just put on your bonnet and come out of this house instantly, and I shall take you back to your mother, who is pretty well as bad as yourself ; and you may consider yourself lucky that I don't bring an action against you both for conspiracy."

Then she saw that her chances were over and that the game was up. His last words had rather frightened

her, but for all that she was determined to fling off the mask now that her last hope was gone, and to give him back as good as he gave ; and she had one more card to play—that of revenge !

She stood up and began putting her bonnet on before the glass—and for a weeping woman, who had not three minutes before appeared to be sobbing out her very soul, she certainly had become very dry-eyed all of a sudden.

" You talk of deception and conspiracy, Lord Mannering, but I do not think you ought to say much about that yourself—you who have concealed your rank, and passed yourself off under a false name, in order to make love to a friendless girl who trusted and believed in you."

" If you had not played the spy, and come out to listen in the orchard, you would not have known this," cried Mannering, indignantly.

" I beg your pardon," she answered coldly, and went on tying her veil with slow and deliberate elaboration. " Within a few days of her arrival in our house Miss Forrester, with a sweet ingenuity and candor—" this was said with a sneer—" began to talk of you as *Mr. Florian!* I was instantly aware of the deception you had practised upon her, and as it was none of my business I held my tongue."

" You were right so far."

" Yes," she said, turning upon him suddenly, with a savageness which reminded him of the action of a wild animal about to spring. " Yes, but I should be right no longer were I to keep silence now. Believe me, my lord, I shall lose no time in revealing to Miss

Forrester what is your name and rank, and also that you are engaged to be married to Miss Greythorne, and that the wedding is to take place very shortly; and you may be sure that I shall not fail to warn her most solemnly and most emphatically against the advances of a man who, having no power to marry her, can only be actuated by the vilest and most iniquitous of intentions."

"*Gertrude!*" cried Mannering, aghast. "Surely you will not be guilty of so cruel and so uncalled for an action! I entreat you, for the sake of our ancient friendship, to refrain from saying anything to Miss Forrester. Surely you must know that my intentions towards her are everything that is honorable. I am only anxious to break off my engagement to Miss Greythorne in order to make Hester my wife."

"Ah! so you say," said Gertrude, turning round smilingly at him. Her revenge was sweet to her, and she thoroughly enjoyed it. "But I don't think, when she hears a full account of you from me, that she will believe much in your *honorable* intentions!"

"Gertrude, I implore you!" cried Florian, distractedly.

"You may marry *me* if you like, Lord Mannering," said his tormentor, still smiling sweetly at him. "That is, I am sorry to say, the only other alternative I can offer you. Come, since we must go, give me your arm, and let us take the carriage that is waiting to the station—or to the church, whichever you wish; it is not yet too late."

They went out into the hall arm-in-arm, and Gertrude, walking up to the radiant landlady, shook her

by the hand, and said aloud to her, so that all the waiters and maids might hear, "Good-by, Mrs. Jones. Many thanks for your kindness. We are going to be married, you see, but we find we shall not want you to come to the church;" and then they both got into the carriage, and were driven—not to the church—but to Charing Cross.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT CHARING CROSS.

The mind of that venerable and respectable personage, Mr. Gibbs, who held the important office of butler in Mr. Greythorne's establishment, was certainly sorely exercised and bewildered upon that eventful morning.

There had been, first, the arrival of the excited old gentleman who had almost forced his way into his master's study, and whom Mr. Gibbs had eventually gathered to be an important personage; there had been loud voices and many words in the study during his visit, as Mr. Gibbs, standing without in the passage, could testify; then there had been that unwonted episode of the best brown sherry ordered up—not for the delectation of the aristocratic and excitable old gentleman, but for "that young Forrester gent," as Mr. Gibbs in his heart irreverently termed the young man "from The Cottage"—an establishment he held in supreme contempt as owning neither carriage nor men-servants.

That Mr. Greythorne should order up the old brown sherry, and make merry over it with "the likes of him," was astonishing enough to the soul of Mr. Gibbs. But there were more wonderful things still to come.

Some few minutes after young Mr. Forrester had departed from the house, there was suddenly heard the

loud and repeated ringing of the study bell. Gibbs rushed to the rescue, and saw no less remarkable a sight than Lady Cressida stretched upon the sofa, face downwards, in a violent fit of hysterics, whilst his master stood over her in helpless perplexity,

"Send for Dawson—bring water and sal-volatile and eau-de-Cologne instantly!" ejaculated Mr. Greythorne, breathlessly.

Gibbs retired hastily and summoned Dawson, the lady's maid, to her ladyship's assistance. But Gibbs by this time began to put two and two together, and the result of his cogitations was, that he was very sure that something most unusual and of a highly-disturbing nature must have happened in the family. The brown sherry was a fact worthy of notice; but that Lady Cressida should be found in hysterics was something so exceedingly remarkable that Gibbs began to have the gravest apprehensions. That Mr. Greythorne had suddenly become a pauper, and had fortified himself with sherry before breaking the news to his wife, was the very least of his surmises. If this were the case the household would be broken up, and Mr. Gibbs himself thrown out of an uncommonly easy and comfortable situation; was not this enough to bring care and anxiety to the brow of a fat and well-fed family butler?

Whilst these depressing thoughts were disturbing the peaceful soul of the great Mr. Gibbs, poor Mr. Greythorne was endeavoring to restore his wife to self-control, and to a calm consideration of the inevitable facts of the case.

But Lady Cressida was too thoroughly upset by the,

to her, terrible news, to be able to take anything calmly. She went out of one frenzy into another.

First of all, a blind disbelief of the truth of the report possessed her; she knew it was false—a got-up tale, invented to torment and make her miserable—to induce her to give up a match upon which her heart was set; then suddenly she turned upon her unfortunate husband in a paroxysm of fury. It was all his doing—he had taken Ida's part against her, and put Lord Mannering up to the simplest way of breaking off the engagement; then again, tears and shrieks, and declarations of utter misery and laments over the fate of her poor darling, deserted daughter.

In the end Mr. Greythorne was obliged to resign her to Dawson and the salts and sal-volatile. Lady Cressida consented at last to be taken upstairs to her own room, and was given over entirely to the care of her domestics. Her last words to her husband were spoken faintly and spasmodically, and were choked and broken by sobbing sighs.

"Go—and break it—to Ida—I haven't the courage—it—would—kill me!" So saying, she disappeared up the stairs greatly to her husband's relief.

Meanwhile Dick had gone back to his sister's house in a state of excitement and exultation too great to be depicted. He felt utterly incapable of attending to business, and sent a telegram into the City to the effect that he was unable to appear at his office. He was only bent upon imparting the great and wonderful news to Hester.

The brother and sister had bidden farewell to each other in the morning, as Hester intended to return to

the Grange some time during the day; and Dick would, in the natural course of events, have gone on to the City from his inquiries in Eaton Square, without again returning to Mrs. Wright's house in Kensington.

Great, therefore, was Hester's surprise when she caught sight of her brother coming rapidly up the steps of the house within about an hour of his departure from it.

She ran hastily forward to meet him.

"Dick! has anything happened? What brings you back again so soon?"

He caught hold of her hands, and kissed her impetuously.

"Come into the dining-room, and I will tell you."

He drew her into the room.

All the little Wrights between the ages of seven and eleven were studiously employed round the table in looking over their lesson books before the arrival of the daily governess.

"Bah! not here; it's full of children!" he cried impatiently; "let us try Wright's study."

He pushed open the door of the room on the opposite side of the hall, with the same lamentable results. Being a wet morning, there was no going out for the little ones, and a second detachment of young Wrights, ranging between the ages of two and seven, was employed, under the care of the nursery maid, in making the animals go "by two's and two's" into the Noah's ark placed in the middle of their father's writing-table.

Dick slammed to the door with an exclamation not quite admissible in ladies' society.

"What on earth is to be done in a house of this

kind?" he cried impatiently. "May Heaven defend me from all the horrors of a large family!"

"Never mind," said Hester, cheerfully, "let us sit on the stairs."

So upon the stairs they sat down hand in hand as they used to do when they were children, and Dick told his great news. Even here they were not quite undisturbed, for the loud howling of Mr. Wright's youngest-born came down deafeningly and piercingly from the upper regions behind them. Nevertheless, Dick managed to tell his news.

"Lord Mannering has eloped with somebody!"

"With Ida?"

"Good Heavens! no; with somebody else. I don't know who she is; but that doesn't signify—he has gone off with some girl or other from his own part of the country—and, oh! Hester, Ida is free, and am not I the happiest man in London?"

"How very extraordinary! What a brute this Lord Mannering must be!"

Oh, if she had only guessed the truth!

"Yes—of course he is a brute—but what does that signify? He has deserted Ida, and she is free, and her father will give her to me."

"Does Ida know?"

"Not yet—her father was to tell her. She will be on the sofa for the first time this afternoon. I wonder when they will let me see her—to-morrow, perhaps," and the lover's eyes grew soft and dreamy at the mere hope of seeing her again.

"Will not the shock be very great for her—will it hurt her?"

"Happiness never yet hurt anybody. It is my belief it will make her well and strong in a couple of days, merely to hear of it," said Dick, joyfully.

"Then there is Lady Cressida to manage—"

"What can Lady Cressida do now? Her paragon has fled, and she will be unable to carry out her persecution of my poor darling."

"How odd it is that I never saw Lord Mannering all the time he was at Strathendale," said Hester, musingly. "You saw him—did you not, Dick?"

"Yes, once. I saw him riding out with her. I could have killed him—I hated him so. Now I can afford to forgive him."

"Was he good-looking?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Dick, with supreme contempt; "a tall, thin man, who didn't look good for much—narrow-chested and thin-faced."

It will be easily understood that this unflattering description did not call up to Hester's mind the slightest resemblance of her own lover, whom, looking at through all the glamour of love, she considered to be a model of everything that was desirable and admirable in manly beauty.

"I used to wish I had seen Ida's Lord Mannering," she said musingly; "but now I am glad that I never did; he has behaved very badly indeed to her. How can he tell that he has not broken her heart?"

"He is nothing more to her now—she never did care for him, and she always loved me, although you would not believe it."

"I thought it unwise of you to allow yourself to think about a woman so far above you in worldly

position, Dick," answered Hester, gently; "and forgive me for saying, even now, that I hope you are not too sanguine in reckoning upon her willingness to marry you; remember that you are a poor man."

But Dick would listen to no words of caution; he stopped his sister's more reasonable words by kissing her, and telling her that she knew nothing about either Ida or himself.

"You have never had a lover, Hester, or you would know better," he said laughingly.

"Have I not?" said Hester, incautiously, and then blushed furiously at her indiscretion.

"Have you?" cried Dick, opening his eyes very wide at her. "Oh, Hester, how guilty you look, and how red you are—you certainly must have got some news to tell me in return for mine. Out with it at once, Hester—who is the lucky fellow?"

"Oh, Dick!" said Hester, confusedly. "I oughtn't to have said anything—indeed nothing is settled—it is a secret. I have promised to tell no one."

"Still, there *is* a lover, Hester?" persisted Dick, smiling.

Hester was too thoroughly truthful to deny it.

"It does seem hard not to be able to tell my own brother," she said.

"Why should there be any secret about it?" inquired Dick, who, although imprudent concerning his own love affairs, could be wise enough about other people's. "If a man is wooing a girl honestly and straightforwardly, there is no occasion to have any mystery in the matter. Are you sure that it is all right, Hester, dear?"

"Why, of course it's all right," said Hester, feeling surprised at the question.

"And you know the reason of the secrecy?"

She was silent for a few minutes.

"To tell you the truth, Dick," she said presently, with an unusual gravity in her beautiful face, "I do *not* know the reason of it. I only know that there are family reasons—he will tell me nothing more—but I have such implicit faith and trust in him, that I have promised not even to press him with inquiries."

Dick shook his head.

"I don't like it, Hester—not at all," he said gravely.

"Neither do I, Dick; that is the truth. Not that I don't believe in him, because I do, thoroughly; but because I don't like hiding anything from papa and mamma and from you. And now, having said this much, I will ask him to let me at least tell everything to you. I shall see him this evening," she added, blushing.

"Well, sister mine, I think you will be right in insisting upon a fair and open explanation of things to your family; if he cannot afford to marry you, let him at least not be ashamed to own his engagement to you."

"I quite agree with you, Dick; and now will you go with me to Charing Cross and see me off? it is pretty well time that I should be starting, if I am to go back by this train."

The adieux to the Wright family were made, the cab was called and the luggage placed upon it, and then Dick and his sister started to Charing Cross Station.

Hester at heart felt happy to be on her way back to

the Grange. Much as she had enjoyed being with Dick, she could not help secretly rejoicing at the thought of meeting her lover again. She had been now two whole days away from him, and when one is very much in love, two days seem like an age.

She did not speak much to her brother on her way to the station. All sorts of sweet dreams of her next meeting with him—of what he would say to her, of how he would greet her—kept her silent and conjured up soft, happy smiles to her face.

The station was reached a little early; there were ten minutes to wait until the train started—the brother and sister walked up and down the platform together, talking earnestly. All at once Dick, turning suddenly round, exclaimed,—

"By Jove! if there isn't Mannering himself! with a lady too!—it must be the bride in person!"

Hester turned sharply—a low, smothered cry burst from her lips—she caught at Dick's arm for support; and then the station, and the people coming and going, and the porters and the trains, swam in wild confusion before her eyes, and she all but fainted.

What she had seen was—Gertrude Tracy walking with John Florian.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW IDA GOT BETTER.

Ida lay upon the sofa in her bedroom at Eaton Square, as white as the pillow against which her head was supported.

Of all the excitement of the last few days—of all the strange events which had altered and changed the whole of her future life—Ida herself was as perfectly unconscious as though she had been the denizen of another sphere.

Into the stillness and tranquillity of her sick chamber there entered not the faintest echo of the doings of the world without. No violent emotions crossed the threshold of her door; no disturbing agitations troubled the monotonous yet peaceful atmosphere that shrouded her, as with a curtain, from all that was passing without, and that was, in truth, of such vital importance to her.

The hushed voices of those who came to her door—the softened footsteps of the hired nurse—the subdued light from the shaded windows—the gentle creaking of the doctor's boots as he crept in for his daily visit—these things went on undisturbedly about her day after day with a never-ending monotony, which only failed to fret and worry her because she had neither the strength nor the heart either for fretting or worry-

ing. The girl was getting better, it is true; but as she recovered slowly and almost imperceptibly, she gathered no strength by the way. It was as if the life she had come back to had struggled back into her veins in spite of herself. She had not wanted to live; death would have been almost welcome to her; for what in truth was the life to which she had been so painfully and laboriously brought back?

Day after day she lay still in her bed, white and silent—speaking seldom, smiling never—taking no interest in any single thing about her, asking no questions about the people that she knew, and with hardly the strength, indeed, to think out the weary problem of her life.

When the day came that the doctor recommended she should be taken out of bed and placed upon the sofa, it was not so much that he considered her in any way better, as that he hoped that the change might arouse her from the condition of dull apathy which was beginning to puzzle, and indeed almost to alarm him. Even the bodily fatigue, he thought, might do her good.

The change was made, and Ida, weak and exhausted by the slight exertion, was laid in her pretty dressing-gown of blue satin and lace upon the couch at the foot of her bed.

She looked so white and so thin, that it went to the heart even of the hired nurse who attended her. All her pretty color had fled; her bright hair fell back lusterless and dim upon her pillows, her eyes looked preternaturally large, and seemed to be almost violet against the dead-white of her skin; and as to her hands

—little white snowflakes that lay weakly and nervelessly against her satin wrapper—she could have counted every bone and every vein in them, so thin and transparent had they become.

The move had certainly tired her, but it did not seem at first to be productive of any other result. There was none of the usual pleasure of an invalid at finding herself out of her bed; no desire for occupation or amusement, which is one of the most hopeful signs of returning health.

Ida asked for no book, expressed no wish to see anyone, took no notice of the flowers that some one—she little guessed who—had sent her just before she left her bed, and, in fact, exhibited not one whit more of animation and of life than she had done for the whole of the last week. She only lay quite still and silent; sometimes a long, low sigh burst almost involuntarily from her lips, and once two large tears rolled down slowly one by one from her wide-opened eyes, and dropped all unheeded and unbrushed away upon her pretty dressing-gown.

"Your papa wishes to know whether he shall come and see you, miss?" said the voice of the nurse at her side.

"Papa? Oh, yes, tell him to come in."

Mr. Greythorne entered on tiptoe—the proper mode of progressing in a sickroom according to his notions—but not productive of happy results on this occasion; for the room being somewhat dark, he first tripped over a footstool, and then upset a chair in his efforts to be unusually quiet.

At length, however, he landed himself safely in a

substantial armchair by the side of his daughter's sofa. The nurse placed a call-bell by his elbow, and left the room.

"My poor darling, how do you feel?" he said, laying his hand gently on hers.

"I shall be better soon, thank you, papa." She had given him the same answer every morning for the last week; it was less trouble to her probably than any other form of words.

"You look sadly frail and delicate, my poor child," said her father, looking at her anxiously.

She smiled faintly and closed her eyes, but made no answer.

He remained quite silent for a few minutes, looking at her intently, then with a beating heart he suddenly summoned up all his courage and put a question to her.

"Ida, are you unhappy, my dear?"

Her eyes opened with a start; she turned her head towards him, and the first tinge of color that had been seen in her face since her illness flooded for one instant her thin and pallid cheeks. He saw that if she had been startled by his question, her attention and interest had at any rate been awakened. He had the wit to pursue the trifling advantage at once.

"Do not be afraid to confide in your father, my pet," he said caressingly; "if anything troubles or grieves you, tell your old father all about it. How can you tell that I shall not be able to comfort you and to help you?"

"Nobody can help me," she said, in a broken voice, and then a whole shower of tears came raining down

over her cheeks. It was better so, he knew, than the silence and the inanition of her previous condition.

"How can you tell that I cannot help you, child? Ida, tell me, is it about your marriage?"

"Oh! papa!" Her weak hands sought her handkerchief, and she lifted it to her face.

"Are you not happy at the idea of marrying Mannering?"

"Don't ask me," she said, sobbing. "Mamma will be so angry, and I have quite resigned myself to it now; there is no hope for me—nothing can be done—nothing!"

"Do you not love him, Ida?" continued her father, earnestly—he was well determined to unravel the secret of her heart ere ever he mentioned Dick Forrester's name to her. "A little bird has told me," he continued, using the old familiar nursery fiction so as to make light of the matter to her, "that you would gladly shake off your engagement to him if you dared—if you were not afraid of your mamma. Is this so, my dear?"

Then Ida nestled her head down and laid it upon his shoulder.

"I don't want to be a trouble to any one, papa," she murmured. "I have given you trouble enough—you and mamma. If it is right that I should marry him—and, indeed, I can see that it is my duty—then I am quite prepared to do so; he is very good, and I know that you and mamma wish me very much to marry him."

"Then you do love him?" said Mr. Greythorne, with a feeling of disappointment.

She was silent a minute, then she answered slowly,—

"I will do my very best to make him a dutiful and affectionate wife."

Mr. Greythorne felt at once that his question was unanswered.

"Ida," he said presently, "would it be a grief to you if you were told that you could not become Mannering's wife?"

She lifted her head up suddenly, and looked at him.

"A grief, papa?" she said in a startled voice.

"Yes. I mean would it be a great shock if I were to tell you that you must give him up—that it was impossible that you could ever marry him?"

She held her hand against her heart, as though to still its wild beating.

"Papa, for pity's sake do not trifle with me—do not say such things if there is nothing in them."

He was still uncertain of her meaning. He looked at her earnestly and anxiously as he spoke the next words,

"My dear, I will not trifle with you: it is so."

"Oh! do you mean it?" she cried piteously. "Tell me what it is—do not keep me in suspense!"

And then he told her the truth.

"My child, it is impossible that you can marry Lord Mannering, because he has run away with another lady, and, I believe, is by this time married to her."

A rush of color flooded her face; then suddenly she flung both her arms round her father's neck, and burying her face upon his bosom, burst into a very tempest of sobs.

"My darling, my pet!" he cried, much disturbed; "does it make you so very unhappy?"

"Unhappy! Oh, papa! do I look unhappy?"

She held up her face; it was radiant through her tears. Such an intense joy shone in her eyes that she no longer looked like the same girl that had lain so pale and quiet on her sofa when he first came in. Her whole face was in a glow; her tears fell it is true—but they were tears of delight and not of sorrow; her hands trembled and shook within his, but it was from happiness, and not from grief.

Glad as he was to see the almost miraculous effect his tidings had had upon her, it was a positive shock to the father to consider how terrible must have been the nervous suffering of his child, and how great the pressure must have been that had been put upon her to force her into a marriage from which it caused her so much joy to be released.

And then he ventured to say another word to her,—

"Ida, is there somebody else?"

She hid her face again upon his shoulder, and kissed his coatsleeve caressingly.

"Did I not once hear of a young lady who went out alone on a rainy night and waded across a swollen river in order to see a certain young gentleman?—who was that, Ida?"

"Oh, papa!" very low indeed.

"Was that young gentleman's name Dick Forrester?"

No answer, only a dumb caress against the coatsleeve

"Do you love him, my child?"

And then suddenly she drew herself out of his arms, and sank back upon her pillows weeping again.

"Oh, papa!" she cried; "he will never—never come near me again. He came here one day and asked me to choose between him and—and my engagement; and mamma was horribly angry with him, and I was weak and frightened, and did not dare to speak; and then he said hard, cruel things to me, and he went away full of anger! He will never forgive me or come back here any more!"

"Oh, Ida—Ida! are you sure that he will never come back? Have you never looked at your face in the glass, child? Does a man get hopelessly angry with a lovely woman whom he loves, if he have a chance of winning her? Dry your eyes, you silly child, and look at the flowers upon your table. Who do you suppose sent them to you?"

She looked up swiftly and joyfully, and reached her hands out for the flowers.

"*Dick*," she said, below her breath—"*Dick* sent these to me!" and then she buried her face in their dewy fragrance, and pressed the delicate waxen blossoms of her bouquet against her lips. "To think they should have been here on my table, and I never guessed that *he* had sent them!" she said, more to herself than to him.

He watched her delightedly; there was no doubt now upon his mind about his child's secret, nor about what there was to be done to make her happy.

She turned to him presently and laid her hands in his.

"You have seen him, papa?"

"He has been here every day."

"And—and—?"

"And what, pussy? Am I going to let you run away with him? Is that what you want to do?"

"If you please, papa," she answered demurely.

"I suppose I can't help myself. Yes, child, you may marry him if you like. I will give my consent to the banns being published as soon as ever you are strong enough to walk across the room."

"That will be very soon indeed, papa, dear," she answered gaily. "But oh!" with a sudden look of dismay, "what will mamma say? Will she consent too?"

"Mamma will consent by-and-by, Ida; she will have to do so, in fact, because I shall lay my commands upon her; and I beg you to observe that your mother, although she was unduly prejudiced in favor of a certain viscount, is nevertheless a good woman. She is quite sure to obey me as in duty bound. Don't make yourself unhappy over that, pussy; it will all come right."

She lay quite still for a few minutes, with a little flush and a happy smile upon her face; then she suddenly turned again to him,—

"Papa, mayn't I see Dick? I should like him to come and see me to-morrow."

"Pussy-cat, you are getting positively impudent!" he said laughingly, and pinched her cheek. Then he stooped down and kissed her, and left her alone to her own happy thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ALTERED WILL.

Lord Mannering, all unconscious of who it was who had seen him and his supposed bride at Charing Cross Station, proceeded on his homeward journey with Gertrude Tracy, with, it may be imagined, very gloomy and angry feelings. Hardly a word was exchanged between himself and his companion during the short railway journey that lasted barely an hour. Once, indeed, as they neared their destination, Gertrude bent forward and spoke to him,—

"I give you one more chance, Lord Mannering. If you will marry me—or, at all events give me a written promise to do so within two months—I will not betray you to Hester Forrester."

His only answer was a gesture of anger and indignation.

She leaned back again in her corner.

"Very well, then; you know what you will have to expect."

"You are a fiend!" replied Mannering, savagely, and after that it will be supposed that the conversation was not resumed.

On reaching their own station Lord Mannering got out, and with grave but silent politeness handed his companion from the carriage. There were the station

master and two porters standing by on the platform, besides several farmers who had got out of the train, and who were also witnesses of their arrival.

"Call a fly for Miss Tracy," said his lordship aloud to one of the porters.

The fly was called, and Gertrude got into it.

"To Orchard Grange," said Lord Mannering again, in a plainly audible voice. He lifted his hat to the lady, and the fly drove off, he himself following on foot in the direction of Wilmerton Hall.

Scandal, which had already been aroused in the neighborhood, owing to the strange comings and goings by rail of the last few days, could make nothing of the singular manner in which these two persons had thus returned home. Even the stationmaster, who prided himself upon being up in every morsel of gossip and news, could only look after the two in a puzzled manner, and was fain to acknowledge to the bystanders that he could make neither head nor tail of the business.

Lord Mannering had no sooner arrived at the doors of his grandfather's house than he became instantly aware that something of an unusual nature was going on within it. A carriage—it was the doctor's brougham—stood in front of the house, and a knot of men-servants were eagerly chattering together just inside the hall door.

As he approached, these men looked at him and then at each other, in a singular manner; and what was still more curious, when he came quite close to them, they made no attempt to move aside in order to let him enter.

"Now then," he cried out, somewhat angrily, "what are you fellows standing about here, crowding up the doorway, for? Move back, some of you, and let me pass. What is the matter? Why is Dr. Baker's carriage here? and for goodness' sake don't stand staring at me like a set of idiots—move back, I say, instantly!"

But not one of them stirred.

"Oh, my lord—" began one.

"We have had orders—" stammered another.

"If you would let me call her ladyship to explain—" said a third.

This was very extraordinary. Lord Mannering began to think they had all gone mad. The men looked at him respectfully enough, but they seemed to be embarrassed and even distressed in speaking to him, and they all with one accord stood with marked incivility in the doorway, so that it was impossible for him to pass into the house. He began to perceive that something unusually serious was the matter.

"Her ladyship is here?" he answered them, with surprise, for he had imagined his mother to be in Yorkshire; "then in Heaven's name go and fetch her at once, and let me understand what all this is about."

One of the powdered footmen went off with alacrity, whilst another volunteered to give him the information that Lord Wilmerton had returned from London two hours ago, and had been taken ill immediately on his return, and had sent for the doctor.

Lady Mannering, it appeared, had returned unexpectedly from Yorkshire about half an hour later than her father-in-law.

Florian was not specially depressed upon hearing of his grandfather's illness—he was so often ill.

"Gout, I suppose?" he inquired carelessly.

"I believe so, my lord," answered the servant, and he did not notice the unusual gravity of the man's face as he said the words.

At this moment Lady Mannering appeared; her face was full of dismay and consternation; she seemed almost uncertain as to what she should do.

"If anything is said, you can lay the blame upon me," she said hurriedly, turning to the men-servants. "You have quite done your duty; no fault can be found with you."

Then she took her son's hand, and led him hastily into a small side-room that opened into the hall, closing the door carefully behind her.

"In Heaven's name," cried Florian, impatiently, "what is the meaning of all this fuss and mystery, and why was I stopped from coming into the house?"

"Because your grandfather has given orders that you are never to be admitted into it again! Oh, you unhappy boy! you have ruined yourself forever!"

And Lady Mannering sank upon a sofa, and burst into a flood of tears.

"My dear mother!"

"Do not make excuses, you wretched and unfortunate boy! Your grandfather knows all."

"All! What does he know?"

"That you are married to that miserable woman, Gertrude Tracy; and he has been up to town and altered his will in consequence. See, here is your

wife's letter, which she had the brazen impudence to address to him."

And Lady Mannering handed him the note which Gertrude had written to Lord Wilmerton, and which we have already read.

Florian uttered a low whistle as he took the letter from his mother's hand. When he had read it he laughed angrily.

"Oh, Florian, how could you do such an insane action? What can have driven you to it?" cried his mother, in accents of despair.

"To begin with, mother, I have *not* done it, if by "doing it" you mean that I have married Miss Tracy. She is not my wife."

Lady Mannering sprang joyfully from the sofa.

"What!" she cried excitedly. "It is all false, then? Is it a fabrication? You have not been up to London, and been there two days with her? You have been somewhere else? You can prove it? Speak, speak quickly, for God's sake, my son! It may not be too late even now!"

"My dear mother, one thing alone, thank God, is false," answered her son, gravely, "and that is—that Miss Tracy is my wife. She is Miss Tracy still, and is now at Orchard Grange, under her mother's protection. Be reassured, my dear mother, on that point. I have never had the slightest desire to marry her; in fact, I would rather die than do so. But there is, unfortunately, no denying that I have got myself into a dreadful scrape, out of which I confess I do not see my way; and that my grandfather should know of my escapade to London is a fresh

complication, which certainly increases my difficulties. Sit down, dear mother, and let me tell you the whole story."

She sat down, and he told her everything—of his half-heartedness in his engagement to Ida—of his sudden fancy to Hester, of the way in which he had unexpectedly met her again, and of how his fancy had been transformed into deep and true love. He did not hide one single detail from her. He told her of his weakness and his temptations: of how he had madly and desperately determined to persuade Hester into a clandestine marriage, and of how Gertrude had played her shameful and all but successful trick upon him; he described all that had happened in London, and told her of his homeward journey up to the moment, not half an hour ago, when he had seen Miss Tracy safely into the fly that had conveyed her away out of his sight.

When he had finished his story, poor Lady Mannering sighed from the very depths of her heart, and wrung her hands despairingly.

"It is bad, very bad," she said, with a sort of groan —"almost as bad as it could well be! The fact remains that you have behaved shamefully to Miss Greythorne, and thrown her over—irreparably, I suppose!"

"Irreparably," assented Florian, gravely but decidedly.

"I do not see, besides, how we could possibly explain things to your grandfather. In his present state, his mind would never grasp so intricate and extraordinary a story. Do you know that he is very ill?"

"Only gout, I suppose?"

"The gout has struck inwardly. Dr. Baker thinks very badly of him indeed; he considers there is very little chance of his recovery—but we have sent for further advice."

"Indeed! I am deeply distressed to hear it," said Lord Mannering, and he was smitten with a pang of sincere remorse, for he could not help divining that the shock of the news of his own conduct had but too probably dealt the old man his death-blow.

"He told the Greythornes when he was in town," continued Lady Mannering.

"I am glad of that; it is a relief to me to know that they are aware of my conduct to them, for which, indeed, I am unable to offer any excuse."

"He then went on to his solicitor's and ordered him draw up a new will. Oh, Florian, he is going to leave every shilling away from you that he can! You will be a poor man with a large estate! Oh! why have you thrown away all your prospects in this reckless manner?"

Lord Mannering—devotedly as he loved Hester, and resolute as he now was to make her his wife at any price—could not but look grave at the news which his mother thus gave him. An earl is but a small personage when he has eight hundred a year and an estate to keep up on it. He felt unable to offer any consolation either to himself or his mother upon his prospects.

"My only comfort," he said gloomily, after a few moments of painful silence, "is that Ida herself did not, I believe, love me very much. I think from what she herself told me when I proposed to her, that al-

though she liked me sufficiently, she had only consented to the marriage to meet the wishes of her parents—all along that has been my greatest consolation."

Lady Mannering only sighed; she did not care about Ida's feelings; it was her son's lost fortune over which she lamented.

"He has telegraphed to town to his solicitor since he was taken ill," she said presently; "he is to bring down the will for him to sign."

Lord Mannering looked up.

"The will that is to ruin me is not signed? All is not yet lost, then?"

"Alas! no entreaties will induce him now to change his mind. I have been for an hour upon my knees before him!"

"But if he is so ill," said Florian, in a low voice, "will the lawyer arrive in time?"

Lady Mannering, too, lowered her voice to an awe-struck whisper. There are some things that are best spoken in a low voice.

"The train that should bring him is due at the station now; he ought to be here in five minutes."

At that instant there was a great commotion above, and a hurrying of footsteps overhead. In a few minutes a servant rushed hastily into the room.

"My lord is taken worse! Dr. Baker says would you come up at once, my lady?"

Lady Mannering hurried from the room.

Florian at that very moment, glancing out of the windows, beheld the dark body of the brougham that had been sent to the station to meet the lawyer coming rapidly up the avenue.

A few minutes of breathless suspense, then Lady Mannering came rushing into the room again.

"He will not see me!" she cried brokenly. "He cannot live ten minutes now, Dr. Baker says. Pray Heaven the train may be late!"

Florian pointed to the brougham.

"Will he live to sign it?" he gasped hoarsely.

At such a time there was no possibility of concealment between the mother and son.

Lady Mannering uttered a faint cry. The brougham had dashed up to the door, and the figure of the soberly-clad, middle-aged solicitor, with a legal-looking bag under his arm, was seen emerging from it.

"He is in time!" cried Lady Mannering, and flung up her hands in despair.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HESTER'S DESPAIR.

It was some minutes after that fatal encounter at the Charing Cross Station before Dick Forrester could clearly understand what it was that had so upset his sister. Her first inarticulate words had been a prayer to him to let her get away.

She hurried him into the waiting-room, and sat down, faint and breathless, upon the nearest chair. He fetched her a glass of water, and looked anxiously at her pale face and white trembling lips.

"My dear sister, how ill you look! What has happened to you?" he inquired perplexedly.

"Did you not see?" she said shudderingly.

"See what? I only saw Lord Mannering, as I told you. Do you know her—the lady, I mean?"

Hester trembled violently.

"Yes, I know her," she said faintly. "But it is not Lord Mannering, Dick; you are mistaken."

Dick opened his eyes in surprise.

"Why, who else do you suppose it was? I know him perfectly. It is certainly Lord Mannering, and no one else! Hester, what is the matter? You are going to faint, I believe! You cannot go by this train—you are too ill."

"No, I can't go by this train. I can't go back there

again at all, ever! Oh! Dick, take me away!" she moaned. "Take me somewhere away from everybody! Not back to Margaret's —I could not go there! Take me to your own rooms till I can get home to mamma."

With but a dim glimmering of the truth of what had befallen her, Dick, nevertheless, thought it best to obey her in silence. He got her into a cab, and took her home to his own newly-furnished lodgings.

There, by degrees, the whole story came from her pale and shivering lips. Lord Mannering, Ida's lover, was his sister's lover also! And he had betrayed her too—and for Gertrude Tracy!

It seemed to honest Dick Forrester that a man who, being engaged to one woman, could assume a false name in order to make love to a second, and finally run away with a third, was a villain too atrocious to be allowed to live.

He paced up and down the small room in a state of speechless fury, whilst, bit by bit, he wrung the whole sad tale of her love from Hester's lips.

"Horsewhipping is too good for him!" he cried, clenching his hands wildly. "I will expose him! His name shall be a byword over all England, blackguard that he is!"

And then Hester stood up, white and haggard, but stern and erect, with eyes that flashed angrily and fiercely at her brother.

"Hush! Never dare to say such words to me again, Dick! I will not stop here to hear you speak of the man I love in such language!"

"But, Hester," cried Dick, stopping short in amaze-

ment before her, "you cannot love him now! Surely your heart can be filled with nothing but rage and anger against a man like that, who has deceived you from first to last—who first won your heart by false pretences, and then has flung you from him, as if you were a worthless woman of whom his fancy had tired! Do you think I will not be revenged upon a man who has treated my sister in such a fashion?"

"If you hurt a hair of his head—if you speak one harsh or cruel word to him—I will never see you in this world again!" she cried wildly. "I tell you I love him—now, at this very minute, in spite of all he has done to me, better than my life! He has broken my heart, but the worst that he has dealt to me has been powerless to lessen my love!"

Dick was so astonished by this outburst that he was struck dumb for lack of suitable words in which to reply to her.

"Surely," he said to himself, "the ways of women are inscrutable! And the more a man thinks he knows of them, the more unintelligible to him are the windings of their hearts!"

Hester had sunk back, exhausted and weakened by her own violence, upon the chair from which she had arisen.

"Leave me alone!" she said to him presently. "All you can do for me is to let me be in peace. Go out, Dick, about your business, and leave me to myself!"

Seeing that he could do her no good, and that his presence seemed to irritate her, and that his vows of vengeance against the man who had wronged her only

angered her to madness, Dick obeyed her in silence, and left her alone.

For several days the brother and sister remained in Dick's lodgings thus together, whilst Hester endeavored to live down the first shock of her terrible misfortune.

She had written two letters—one to Mrs. Tracy, telling her shortly that she could not return to Orchard Grange, and begging that her belongings might be sent to her at once to her brother's rooms; and one to her mother, to say that, for reasons which she was unable to enter into by letter, she had given up her situation, and that, being far from well, as soon as she could she intended to start northwards, and come home again.

These two letters despatched, she gave herself up entirely to her grief, shutting herself up in the tiny bedroom which Dick had hastily fitted up for her, and refusing to see her brother, save for a few minutes morning and evening.

Never in all her after life could Hester quite think of those few terrible days without a keen recollection of all the agony of suffering which they caused her; nor could she ever entirely forget the keen pain of the awful awakening from the fool's paradise of her happy love to the black and hopeless reality of her shattered life.

The poor girl went over a hundred times all the little details of her interviews with her lover. She took out all his trifling gifts: the simple little ring she had worn upon her finger; the locket with his hair he had hung about her neck; and then the flowers she had taken from his coat and preserved

because he had worn them; and the little cluster of brown nuts which he had playfully tapped against her hand on that never-to-be-forgotten day at The Cottage shrubbery gate when he had first aroused the flame of love in the hitherto untroubled depths of her soul. All these things poor Hester laid out before her on the table, recalling all the little incidents connected with each, raising them one by one to her lips, whilst blinding tears fell fast from her eyes. And then she would tell herself that it was impossible that this man, whose voice and whose eyes had known so well how to speak of love to her, could have been so false.

"It must be some horrible dream!" she would say to herself; some nightmare which had come to her, from which surely, in time, she would awake, and be able to laugh at her dreadful delusions!

But, alas! there seemed to be no awakening out of her troubles.

Shut up within the narrow confines of her brother's room, Hester thus fought out the battle of her sorrow tearfully and broken-heartedly, and indeed not very bravely, but still to the best of the powers of her poor bruised and bleeding heart. And meanwhile the world without went on its way—people were born, and married and died, and she neither knew nor cared.

Dick, it is true, saw old Lord Wilmerton's death in the *Times*, but he did not see that the information would do his sister any good, and thought it wisest to avoid all mention of the subject.

One day she sat as usual, empty-handed and idle, by the fire in her brother's little sitting-room. Dick was

out—probably at Eaton Square, for it was yet early in the day, and he was much engrossed at this time by his visits to the Greythornes, and by his own bright and happy prospects. Hester, therefore, was alone. She was telling herself, for the first time to-day, that she was better and stronger; that she felt more able now to resume her old life and her old place in her parents' house, and that she must delay her return home no longer.

As she looked out of the window upon the dingy London street—at the shabby houses opposite with their grimy brick facings, their dull and gloomy windows, and the broken and blackened chimney-pots which crowned the horizon—there came over her a longing for the free moorland breezes and the wooded hillsides of her native country—for the steep rocks of the narrow glen and the fresh rushing of the Lennan waters below; and such a yearning of home-sickness came over her that suddenly she rose from her chair to find her writing-case, that she might sit down and send a letter to her mother, announcing her arrival at The Cottage on the very next evening.

Just as she had taken her pen in hand the door opened and the servant brought her in a little three-cornered note on a tray. With a strange apprehension at her heart, Hester took it up hastily and opening it with trembling fingers, read the few words scrawled in pencil:—

"I have found out where you are staying. Will you see me? J. Florian."

"The gentleman is very anxious to come up, miss,"

said the servant. But Hester only stared at the scrap of paper in her trembling hands and said nothing.

Then suddenly a blind rage and anger filled her soul. How dare he sign himself by that false name to her? Did he still suppose that she was to be his dupe? No; she would not see him—never in this world again if she could help it!

She crushed up the note in her hand, and tossed it back on to the tray.

"Take the gentleman back his note," she said to the maid; "there is some mistake. I do not know anybody of the name."

The servant left the room.

There was a short pause, and the sound of voices below; then the maid came in again.

"The gentleman says he is sure you will see him, miss—that he has something very particular to say, and hopes you will see him, if only for five minutes."

"Why don't you do as I tell you?" cried Hester, turning round upon her angrily. "Have I not told you that I don't know him? No; I will *not* see him! Go and tell him so again!"

This time there was no delay. The street door was shut to almost instantly with a bang; the visitor had evidently departed.

She crept to the window, and looked furtively out. Across the road she could see a tall, slight figure walking slowly away, with bent head, and hands thrust gloomily into his coat pockets. He did not pause or look back, and presently he turned a corner of the street and was gone.

Then Hester turned away, and, with a gesture of

despair, flung herself wildly down upon her knees, burying her head in the cushions of a chair.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she cried aloud in her misery; "how have I been able to send you away from me without a word or a look? Oh, come back to me, my love, my darling—come back, come back!"

But he was far out of sight and hearing, and there was no answer to her broken-hearted cry.

She lay there a long time, face downwards, amongst the cushions, weeping wildly at first, beating her hands despairingly together, and calling out aloud in her desperate misery and self-pity; but by-and-by she grew quite still and calm. She did not change her attitude, but she lay quietly silent, whilst a sort of numbness and apathy crept over her.

After a long while she roused herself and stood up. She was deadly pale, and as she caught sight of her own face in the glass over the chimney-piece she almost started at the sight of it, so wan and aged did she appear.

"It is all over now," she said to herself, in a low voice. "By my own action I have cut away my last hope. Well, it is better so. There is nothing really that he could have said—nothing could have restored the broken idol of my heart to its pedestal; it is shattered forever. Had I been weak enough to see him but once, the task of spurning him forever out of my heart would only have been all the harder. No, I have done wisely, and now it is over. There is nothing now but to take up my past life again meekly and patiently, and to live down the memory of these months of fatal and deluded happiness."

When Dick came in that evening he found his sister on her knees before her open box packing her clothes.

"Hallo, Hester! what is this for?"

"I am going home to-morrow; I have written to mamma to expect me," she answered, not looking up from her task.

"My dear girl, are you strong enough for the journey, do you think?"

"I am quite well," she answered steadily; "and I am tired of London, and want to get home as soon as I can."

"I wanted you to have seen Ida before you left—she wishes so much to see you."

"Forgive me, dear Dick," she said gently, "I cannot see her now—give her my dear love—and I shall see her by-and-by, when she comes back to Strathendale; and oh! how glad I shall be when your wedding-day comes, dear, and you are happy at last! But do not ask me to see her now!"

She kissed him affectionately, and he said no more to her.

The next morning she started on her homeward journey.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BY THE LENNAN AGAIN.

Ida was rapidly recovering her strength and her spirits, and now went about the house as usual, singing gaily as she went, and with a face as bright as summer sunshine.

Lady Cressida had recovered her disappointment and her blighted ambition, and, like a wise woman, had determined to make the best of a marriage that was clearly inevitable. She had wept a little over her daughter, and had made her peace with her future son-in-law by kissing him on the forehead, informing him as she did so that she had really always been fond of him, only that she felt it a matter of duty not to encourage his attentions to Ida as long as there did not seem to be any hope for him—a statement which Dick good-naturedly took for what it was worth, too thankful, however, to be at peace with Ida's mother, not to be glad to bury the past in oblivion, and to take in good part any conciliatory speeches which she made to him.

Nothing now was talked of but the wedding which it seemed useless to delay any longer. Both Dick and Ida had set their hearts upon its taking place at Strathendale. To Strathendale, therefore, the Greythornes returned as soon as ever Christmas was over;

and Dick, of course, went back to his father's house, where no wounded hero, returning crowned with glorious laurels after the perils of a dangerous war, could have been received with greater enthusiasm than was our friend by his delighted parents.

It seemed to Mrs. Forrester, indeed, as if her beloved son had achieved some wonderful and praiseworthy success in life—which, however, as she repeated a dozen times a day, had been only what she had always prophesied for him, and which was, in fact, but the just reward of his talents and his merits.

Once installed upon the Lennan banks in their old quarters, the intercourse between the lovers became frequent, and the happy days flowed by serenely and peacefully; whilst amidst the smiles and congratulations of their relations and friends they awaited the day which had been fixed for their marriage.

One sad blot only marred their perfect happiness To both Dick and Ida, Hester's condition was a subject of sore distress and sorrow. Little by little Ida had learnt from Dick the truth of poor Hester's unfortunate love-story, and after a while Hester herself spoke of it to her.

"To think that it was I—your friend—for whom he deceived and betrayed you!" she cried one day, pressing her hands with tearful eagerness. "Ah! if I had known that he was *your* lover—do not suppose I could have been so base—"

"My dearest Hester, pray do not distress yourself. As to being my *lover*, to tell you the truth, Lord Mannering—or Lord Wilmerton, as I should now call him—was never that, there was never any *love* between

us. Our relations on both sides wished us to be married, and we endeavored to accommodate ourselves to their wishes—that was about it—and a very poor success we made of it too! I fell in love with Dick—he fell in love with you!"

She shook her head.

"There was no love for me, Ida," she said in a low, pained voice. "A man who could tell me that his name was John Florian—"

"Well, so it was," cried Ida; "those are his Christian names; there was no untruth in that."

"He meant to deceive me—to hide from me who he was—because he knew well enough that had I known him to be your lover I would never have listened to one word from him; and then consider his after conduct—that woman!" and she shuddered.

"There, Hester, I feel convinced that you are mistaken!" cried Ida, eagerly. "Lord Wilmerton is not married to anybody, as I told you the other day. In a letter I had this morning from a friend in Paris, his name is casually mentioned as staying at the same hotel, and not a word is said about a wife. Had there been a new Lady Wilmerton to write about, I am certain my friend would have spoken of her, as she is the greatest gossip I know. There has been, I am sure, some mistake, and you have misjudged and misunderstood him. If you had only seen him once—"

"Do not speak of it, Ida," she interrupted tearfully. "I am thankful I have not seen him; my only prayer is that I may never meet him again."

These were the sort of conversations that frequently passed between the two girls, now so soon to become

sisters; and each one left Hester more hopeless, and Ida more distressed upon her account.

Hester was very much altered. All her bright color had fled, and left her pale and heavy-eyed; she was no longer the brisk, active girl, who used to be so full of life and of happy and useful occupation. She went about drearily and slowly, speaking very seldom, sighing often, laughing never. It made Dick's heart ache to see her; time seemed to do nothing for her, and the weeks as they sped away brought no peace to her heart nor healing to her wound. She told herself over and over again that all was at an end; that she wished to forget him, and to see him no more—yet day and night she was filled with a never-dying yearning to see him once more, with a longing to be with him which nothing could quench or stifle.

Her love, thus repressed and driven inwards, fed upon her strength, and sapped up all the healthy outlets of her life. It was killing her by inches, and those around her sadly saw that it was so, and yet were powerless to help her.

One night Ida, lying awake, pondering over it all, suddenly bethought her of something that she would do. An idea flashed into her brain that seemed nothing short of inspiration. She could hardly bear to wait till morning, so impatient was she to impart her project to her lover. Dick, however, when he listened to her eager and excited words, threw cold water upon them. "She had much better not interfere," he said "the man wasn't worth it; she had better let things alone." Ida held her tongue; she was discouraged, of course, by his adverse opinion, and did nothing at all,

for that day at least. In the night, however, she thought of it again, and so great was the hold that her project began again to have upon her, and so vivid were her previsions of success, that no sooner was it daylight than she jumped out of bed, slipped on her warm dressing-gown, ran to her writing-table and wrote the following letter :—

"STRATHENDALE, *January* 12.

"DEAR LORD WILMERTON,—I am sure you will be surprised at my writing to you, although I don't know why you should be, as I should be very sorry to think we were not friends, in spite of everything; and I daresay you know that I am going to be married very soon to Mr. Forrester. Well, what I am writing to you about is not that; but there is some one here—you will guess who she is—who loves you very dearly, and who is very unhappy. I cannot believe that you have intended to treat a girl who is so good and so beautiful as she is as badly as people say you have. If, indeed, you do not love her, you are right to keep away, so that she may learn to forget you; but, dear Lord Wilmerton, if you do love her, and it is only some wretched misunderstanding between you that keeps you away from her, then pray end it at once, and come up to her, and insist upon seeing her, for indeed the misery of it is simply killing her. Write to me, and tell me the *truth*, I entreat you; and if nothing can be done, then forgive the interference of your old friend,

IDA GREYTHORNE."

This letter was, perhaps, ill-worded and childishly

expressed, but it came straight from Ida's affectionate heart, and as such possessed a genuineness and a ring of sincerity which many a more elaborate composition might easily have lacked.

She said no word to any one, but posted her letter secretly and stealthily. Then she awaited the answer, with what anxiety it is impossible to describe.

Two days went by. Ida was sick with suspense and anxiety. At times she would have given worlds to have recalled her letter. What if she should receive a cold and angry answer to it, full of polite denial of any knowledge of the lady alluded to, and of covered scorn for herself and her unfortunate interference? Or, worse still, what if she should never receive any answer at all? Should she ever dare to confess to Dick the impulsive action she had been guilty of, against his advice and his judgment? Then again she gathered hope, and recollected that he was probably not at Wilmerton, where she had addressed the letter, and that it would have to be forwarded to him wherever he might be staying.

The third morning came—no letter! Ida was on the point of confessing to Dick; her secret was becoming too heavy for her to bear alone. One day longer she determined to wait—that one day turned the scale in her favor. A coroneted letter with the Paris postmark lay on her plate at breakfast. She tore it open breathlessly, and read as follows:—

"Dear Ida,—Let me still call you so. You are an angel—God bless you! I love her with my whole heart—it is only a horrible misundertanding that has

parted us. My heart has been half broken, but now—thanks to you—I trust all will yet be well, and that she will forgive me. I start for England in an hour, and shall go straight to the inn at the Lennan Bridge, where I hope to be on Tuesday night. Will you manage to get her out on the path by the river at eleven on Wednesday morning without telling her that I am there? Did you hear that my poor grandfather died before he was able to sign his will? so that, fortunately, I have not suffered for my follies as I deserve, and can afford to give my beautiful darling all that she is worthy of.—Yours ever gratefully,

"WILMERTON."

. . . . . .

"Come out for a walk, Hester."

"My dear Ida, it is drizzling!"

"Not a bit of it—only a little mist, and it is quite warm. I have come on purpose to drag you out for a walk."

"Why; where is Dick, your bond slave?"

"Oh! he is busy. He does not want me this morning. I want to go and see Mrs. M'Creay at the Lennan Bridge Inn. Somebody told me her baby had bronchitis." (A free invention, Miss Ida!) "We really ought to go and inquire. Do go and get your hat, and come out, Hester!"

Rather reluctantly Hester fetches her hat, and consents to be taken out for a walk. Ida leads the way down to the Lennan side, and they walk along the narrow path by the river in the direction of the Bridge Inn.

Suddenly Ida exclaims,—

"Good gracious! I have left my purse behind in your house. I must go back and fetch it."

"What nonsense! It will be quite safe. You don't want it at the inn, do you?"

"Yes, indeed I do. I owe Mrs. M'Creay some money for little Tommy's schooling. He is my godson, you know, and I pay for him."

"I haven't any money with me," says Hester, feeling in her pockets.

Ida, who has ascertained this fact beforehand, makes a gesture of mock despair.

"I must go back, then. Sit down on this rock, and wait for me."

"Why should I not go with you?"

"I shall go twice as quickly alone. You are not strong enough to run, and I can run the whole way. Sit down here till I come back."

And she darts away, without waiting for an answer.

Hester, who indeed is far from strong in these days, is glad enough to sit down and rest for a few minutes. The river rushes on its way amid its brown boulders before her. The leafless trees murmur a soothing, endless lullaby behind. Far away are the great brown moors, that rise silent and solemn in their winter darkness behind the Strathendale woods on the opposite bank. It is a dear and familiar scene to her—her home—where henceforth her life must be spent. And yet Hester is sad, very sad indeed, as she looks at it all, and her eyes fill slowly with a blinding mist of tears.

Suddenly through the mist she sees some one coming along the path towards her.

A low cry bursts from her lips—a cry half of surprise and half of fear—yet all of gladness too; and then he takes her, without a word, in his arms, and holds her to his heart.

There are no words, no explanations between them—not now, at least—only they look into each other's glad eyes, and understand each other once and forever.

"My darling, don't you know that I love you?" he murmurs, kissing her passionately, and she nestles her head upon his bosom, and answers him only by a low sigh of content.

Moments—they might have been twenty, or they might have been only ten—pass by thus: then suddenly there is a laugh on the path behind them.

"Have you made it up?" cried Ida, with shining eyes. "Yes, I see that you have; then shake hands with me, Lord Wilmerton, and kiss me, Hester, and let us settle to be all married on the same day."

And this was the last of Lord Wilmerton's love affairs.

THE END.

A Few Press Opinions of F. M. Buckles & Co.'s Late Publications

Joan, the Curate

By FLORENCE WARDEN

308 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth 3 stampings, $1.00

The time of the story is 1748, its scene being along the seacoast of Sussex, England. The doings here of the "free traders," as they called themselves, or smugglers, as the government named them, had become so audacious that a revenue cutter with a smart young lieutenant in command, and a brigade of cavalry, were sent down to work together against the offenders. Everybody in the village seems engaged in evading the revenue laws, and the events are very exciting. Joan is the parson's daughter, and so capable and useful in the parish that she is called "the curate." She and the smart young lieutenant are the characters in a romance.
—*Book Notes.*

"Joan, the Curate" (Joan, a creamy-skinned, black-eyed maiden, gets her surname on account of the part she plays in helping her father, Parson Langley, with his duties), is a village tale of the smuggling days on the wild marsh coast of Kent and the equally lonely cliffs of Sussex. The village is a hot-bed of these daring "free traders," even the parson and his daughter are secretly in sympathy with them, and young Lieutenant Tregenna, who is in command of the revenue cutter sent to overawe the natives, has anything but a comfortable task to perform. His difficulties only increase when he falls in love with Joan and discovers her leanings towards the illegalities of the village, and when, at the same time, the audacious leader of the smugglers, Ann Price, who carries on her trade disguised as a man, falls in love with him herself, the complications are almost bewildering. The story moves through countless adventures, sanguinary fights, and lovers' quarrels to the conventionally happy ending and the partial return of the fishermen to honest ways.—*Book News.*

Miss Florence Warden in "Joan, the Curate" tells an orthodox tale of smugglers in the last century with plenty of exciting adventures and no deviations from the accepted traditions of a familiar pattern in fiction.—*N. Y. Sun.*

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F. M. BUCKLES & COMPANY
9-11 East 16th Street, New York

The Real Lady Hilda

By B. M. CROKER

266 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"The Real Lady Hilda," by B. M. Croker, is a very pleasing novel, depending for its interest not upon sensational incident, but upon a clever portrayal of disagreeable traits of character in high society. The story is told by a young lady who finds herself with her stepmother in obscure lodgings in an obscure country town. The head of the family had been physician to a Rajah in India, had lived in princely style and had entertained in princely fashion. He had died and left to his widow and child nothing but a small pension, and they soon found themselves in straightened circumstances. Besides the character drawing, the entertaining feature of the story lies in the shabby treatment which the two impecunious women receive from the people whom they have so royally entertained in India, and the inability of the widow, with her Indian experience, to understand it. Entertaining too is the fawning toadyism of the middle-class women, who disdainfully tip their noses and wag their tongues when they find that the poor women are neglected by the great lady in the neighborhood.

—*The Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

Mrs. Croker belongs to the group of English country life novelists. She is not one of its chief members, but she succeeds often in being amusing in a quiet, simple way. Her gentlefolk lack the stamp of caste, but the plots in which they are placed are generally rather ingenious. Of course, in a field so assiduously worked, one cannot look for originality. The present book is just what the author modestly calls it—a "sketch," with the usual poor girl of good family and the equally familiar happy ending.—*Mail and Express.*

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The Good Mrs. Hypocrite

By "RITA"

284 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"Good Mrs. Hypocrite," a study in self-righteousness is a most enjoyable novel by "Rita." It has little of plot, and less of adventure, but is the study of a single character and a narration of her career. But she is sufficiently unique to absorb the attention, and her purely domestic experiences are quite amusing. She is the youngest daughter of a Scotch family, angular as to form and sour as to feature. She had an aggressive manner, was selfish, and from girlhood set herself against all tenderness of sentiment. Losing her parents, she tried her hand as a governess, went to her brother in Australia, returned to England and joined a sisterhood in strange garb, and her quarrelsome disposition and her habit of quoting scripture to set herself right made her presence everywhere objectionable. For this old maid was very religious and strict as to all outward forms. Finally she went to live with an invalid brother. She discharged the servant, chiefly because she was plump and fair of feature, and she replaced her with a maid as angular as herself, straight from Edinbro'. The maid was also religious and quoted scripture, and the fun of the story lies in the manner in which the woman who had had her way so long was beaten by own weapons.—*Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

The Scotch character is held up in this story at its worst. All its harshness, love of money, unconscious hypocrisy, which believes in lip-service while serving but its own self, are concentrated in the figure of the old spinster who takes charge of her invalid brother's household. She finds a match, however, in the Scotch servant she hires, hard like herself, but with the undemonstrative kindness that seems to be a virtue of the race. The book lacks the charm that lies at the root of the popularity of the books of the "Kailyard" school. In its disagreeable way, however, it is consistent, though the melodramatic climax is not the ending one has a right to expect.—*The Mail and Express.*

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Captain Jackman

By W. CLARK RUSSELL

240 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00

"Captain Jackman; or, A Tale of Two Tunnels," is a story by W. Clark Russell, not so elaborate in plot as some of his stories, or so full of life on the sea, but some of the characters are sailors, and its incidents are of the ocean, if not on it. Its hero is dismissed from the command of a ship by her owners, because of his loss of the proceeds of a voyage, which they evidently think he had appropriated to himself. The heroine discovers him in, and rescues him from a deserted smuggler's cave, where he had by some mischance imprisoned himself. He handsome, she romantic as well, they fall in love with each other. Her father, a retired commander of the Royal navy, storms and swears to no purpose, for she elopes with the handsome captain, who starts on an expedition to capture a Portugese ship laden with gold —a mad scheme, conceived as it appears by a madman, which accounts for his curious and unconventional ways.

—Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.

It is readable, interesting, and admirable in its technical skill. Mr. Russell, without apparent effort, creates an atmosphere of realism. His personages are often drawn with a few indicative strokes, but this can never be said of his central figures. In the present little story the fascinating personality of Captain Jackman stands out very clearly. He is a curious study, and the abnormal state of his mind is made to come slowly into the recognition of the reader just as it does into that of old Commander Conway, R. N. This is really a masterly bit of story-craft, for it is to this that the maintenance of the interest of the story is due. The reader does not realize at first that he is following the fortunes of a madman, but regards Jackman as a brilliant adventurer. The denouement is excellently brought about, although it gives the tale its sketchy character.—*N. Y. Times.*

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9-11 East 16th Street New York

A Rogue's Conscience

By DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

311 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00.

It is rather unusual to find a detective story written from the criminal's point of view, and truth to tell, in this "Rogue's Conscience," by David Christie Murray, we find our sympathies and anxieties strongly following the hunted ones. Mr. James Mortimer and Mr. Alexander Ross were such entertaining sinners, and their disguises were so marvellous, and their escapes so hairbreadth, that we follow the comedy of their fortunes with unfailing cheerfulness. When the scene shifts from city risks to the broad field of mining camp speculations, we see the beginning of the end, for here the "rogue's conscience" commenced to work, and a double reformation ends the book in a blaze of glory. The story has just enough seriousness to give it balance, but by no means enough to destroy the pleasantly light and entertaining quality of the book.—*Literary World.*

David Christie Murray has written an amusing tale of two unworthies in "A Rogue's Conscience." "If you want to enlighten a rogue's conscience, serve him as he served other people—rob him," observes the "hero," who has acquired the "sixth sense of honesty." How he arrived at this sage conclusion, and how he put the principle into effect, all tend toward the live human interest of a story which shows no sign of lagging from beginning to end. The tale is not free from tragedy, but even the sombre parts are handled easily and lightly, as though the author believed them necessary, but yet felt freer in the atmosphere of almost light-hearted roguery which pervades most of the volume. The book is capital reading for a summer afternoon, and action lurks on every page.—*American.*

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A Man's Undoing

By Mrs. H. LOVETT CAMERON

333 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00.

A retired English officer, returned to his widowed mother's quiet home in the country, finds his undoing in idleness, which leads him into a flirtation with a girl socially and intellectually his inferior, but who is clever enough to force marriage upon him. Then complications thicken, as the man discovers the full meaning of his fatal mistake.

—*The Mail and Express.*

"A Man's Undoing" is an exceptionally good novel by Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron. It is not written to tickle the palate of the sated reader who is looking only for new sensations, nor is it intended to amuse for a short hour, it preaches no new doctrine; it presents no novelties of character or incident. Its theme is as old as humanity—the burden of story and song through all the ages. But Mrs. Cameron shows that it has lost none of its interest, that its phases may be presented in new aspects, that the conventionalities of modern civilization have not made it less a force in the affairs of men, nor obliterated any of its eternal truths. Its influence over the lives of men and women varies in extent and results, as the men and women vary in character, subject always to variations of condition and environment: therefore it always presents new studies. All the world loves a lover, and no one knows better than Mrs. Cameron how to make a lover most interesting. Especially skillful is she in her delineations of women who love. She paints other women also to fill out her pictures—the narrow-minded old maids and the gossipy matrons, and none of her women are repellingly bad—but her women who love have all the nobility and strength of womanhood. As she deals with noble character, so she deals with the serious affairs of life, of strong emotions, of heart histories, with all their heroism and pathos. "A Man's Undoing" is admirably constructed. Its lessons will not be lost upon the thoughtful, and it will be read with eager interest by all classes of novel readers..

—*Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

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F. M. BUCKLES & COMPANY
9-11 East 16th Street New York

A Splendid Sin

By GRANT ALLEN

373 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, Three Stampings, $1.00

The title of this book implies audacity, and in this it is true to its teachings. Mr. Allen's independent line of thought was never more clearly defined, and the "splendor" of the sin really takes our breath away. Mr. Allen was always perfectly frank about pot boiling, and therefore took some ground from his critic. but he never lost his power to tell an entertaining story, no matter how startling or improbable it was, nor with what rapidity he dashed it off. "The Woman Who Did" was a difficult heroine to accept, but even she is mild compared to Mrs. Egremont's achievements in the line of independent action in "A Splendid Sin." It would be a pity to take the zest from the reader by outlining the plot, whose chief charm lies in its surprises. Sufficient to say that here is a problem novel with a vengeance, and the spectacle of an illegitimate son ordering his mother's lawful husband out of her house in righteous indignation at his existence is an example of advanced thought rarely met with in every-day life.—*The Commercial Advertiser*, Nov. 18, 1899.

"A Splendid Sin," by Grant Allen, has just been published by F. M. Buckles & Co. It is one of the latest works written by the noted author, of whose untimely death we have just learned. It will be treasured as one of his best novels by the large number of readers who peruse with interest all productions from his pen. It is a study of an act which is universally condemned as a sin. Not in itself as a saving power, but its disclosure comes to an illegitimate son as a blessing, making a happy marriage possible, and saving all concerned from disgrace and misery. Even the sin itself is made to appear lovely and proper in comparison with that other sin which the world readily excuses, namely, the forcing of a marriage where there is no true love or mutual respect. It is a story to please by its plot and action and character drawing, and also to set one thinking upon some of the serious problems of life.

—*Evening Telegram, N. Y.*, Nov. 9, 1899

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9-11 East 16th Street, New York

Hagar of the Pawn-Shop

By FERGUS HUME,

296 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00.

Those who like detective stories will get much enjoyment out of the ten in this book, which have connection enough to give them a certain continuity. Hagar, a gypsy girl, has a wonderful personality, great shrewdness, penetration, and judgment, beside being very handsome, dignified and self-respecting. There are ten different customers, each of whom brings some peculiar article to pawn, and the article has a story of its own, or a very strange mystery. She unravels the mystery, brings criminals to their punishment, and restores fortunes. It is all cleverly done, and Hagar's sagacity is something to be admired. The author is Fergus Hume.—*Literary World*, Nov. 25.

Hagar Stanley, a gypsy, and niece of the dead wife of a miserly old London pawnbroker, is driven by the unwelcome attentions of a gypsy half-breed suitor to flee from her tribe in the New Forest. She takes refuge with old Jacob Dix, the pawnbroker, who, before his death, is trapped by a cheap lawyer into trying unsuccessfully to disinherit his son in favor of Hagar, who defeats the plot, only to discover that the son is the man who drove her from the gypsy tribe. The adventures of the two form the material for Mr. Hume's new story.—*The Mail and Express*, Oct. 26.

This is a volume of detective stories by Fergus Hume, whose "Mystery of a Hansom Cab" will be recalled as a clever bit of writing. Between "The Coming of Hagar" and "The Passing of Hagar" are grouped ten stories, each bearing a separate interest, but each linked together so that they follow in natural order. Hagar is an interesting young Gypsy who comes into charge of a pawn-shop of very doubtful character in a somewhat unusual way. Her adventures and those of her customers are entertaining and lively and the tales are of a stirring character. When Conan Doyle, with Sherlock Holmes, lifted detective stories to a higher plane than they had occupied since the days of Edgar Allen Poe, he opened the way for other writers to explore the field. Fergus Hume has done so with much success; and the present volume is sure of a numerous clientage among those who like the bizarre in fiction.—*American*.

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A Rational Marriage

By FLORENCE MARRYAT

296 Pages, Size 7½ x 5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25.

A Rational Marriage is the title of the book, which is Florence Marryat's latest contribution to her circle of readers. It belongs to that class of light literature which is enjoyed by those who read only for the pleasure of the hour, and will, doubtless, meet with approval from the novel reading public.

The story is of a young woman of rather Bohemian proclivities who lives in a flat and acts as secretary to an elderly nobleman. She has "expectations" from her grandfather, but only in the event of her remaining single, as the old gentleman has decided dislike for matrimony.

How it all turned out may be gathered from the book which comes from the publishing house of F. M. Buckles & Co., New York.

—*Toledo Blade*, Feb. 8.

The late Florence Marryat had a fine appreciation of a humorous situation, and she used it to good purpose in this story, which is based on a clandestine marriage. When rooms are reserved at a certain place for "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," and two couples answering to that name make their simultaneous appearance, there is apt to be some explaining necessary. The embarassments resulting from hasty marriages, in which there is an object in preserving secrecy has been the theme of both novelist and playwright, but the lamented author of this volume has succeeded in extracting about all the humor and aggravation that can be found in the situation. Fancy a man having to play a game of freeze-out with his own wife as the attraction, and yet not daring to acknowledge the relationship! And the fact that the man is a journalist makes it all the more enjoyable.

The volume is a handsome one, the cover design being particularly attractive.—*Rochester Herald*, Feb. 9.

"A Rational Marriage," by the late Florence Marryat, daughter of the famous Captain Marryat, is not a strong story, but it was written with a praiseworthy purpose that shines forth from every page. The purpose is to show the magic power of love. A clever, independent young women, who has formed her own conclusions regarding matrimony, and a bright young newspaper man enter into a marriage agreement with the understanding that everything is to go on exactly as before the ceremony. The young man agrees because it is the only way to secure her, and they are united by a magistrate. Then follow complications; uneasy days and sleepless nights, and all the woes possible to those who, reckoning, without love, enter the matrimonial state After a judicious amount of trial and tribulations the clouds break away for a bright and satisfactory ending. A few contrasting examples of conjugal bliss and single unhappiness are thrown in quite effectively.—*Chicago Tribune.*

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Terence

By MRS. B. M. CROKER

320 Pages, 7½ x 5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25.

It may be truthfully said that the story goes with a rattle from the moment Maureen takes charge of the runaway horses till the time when the hero tells her his love and finds the right answer to be ready on her lips. The dialogue and characterization deserve a special word of acknowledgment and thanks.—*London Literary World.*

Mrs. Croker has given us an Irish story of the right sort—mettlesome and vivacious, and sparkling with the characteristic humor of the country. . . . The story is interesting from beginning to end, and it is sure to be widely read.—*Glasgow Herald.*

There is a freshness, brightness, and charm which make it such a story as, when ended, is laid down with the wish that there had been more of it.—*Scotsman.*

A brightly written story.—*Daily Chronicle.*

Told with a full measure of Mrs. Croker's vivacity and humor.—*Spectator.*

An Australian girl, of semi-Irish blood, and an Irishman whom, though he is driving a public coach, we readily recognize as a gentleman, furnish Mrs. Croker the necessary elements of a love story, set in a brisk tale, full of movement, and the sunny Celtic character.—*Mail and Express*, Feb. 19.

"Terence," by Mrs. B. M. Croker, is one of liveliest novels that she has written. The characters are sharply drawn, and every one of them is worthy of a permanent place in fiction. The dialogue is bright and charming, and all of the incidents are entertaining—some of them thrilling. The *London Literary World* says: "The story goes with a rattle from the moment when Maureen takes charge of the runaway horses till the time when the hero tells her his love and finds the right answer to be ready on her lips. Terence earned his living by driving a coach, but even the least sagacious reader of these chapters will quickly decide that his birth was superior to his occupation, and will guess that Mrs. Croker has waiting in the background a splendid silver lining for the cloud overhanging him in the early portions of her novel. Maureen was an unsophisticated girl from Australia who fully believed with Tennyson that kind hearts are more than coronets. Because she was wealthy, Terence, though he worshipped her with all the zeal and fervor at his command, felt himself compelled to keep silence. But Mrs. Croker and Cupid plotted against him so successfully that in the end Australia and Ireland make a union at the altar."—*Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer*, Feb. 15.

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The Greatest Gift

By A. W. MARCHMONT

145 Pages, Size 7½ x 5, Cloth, Ink aad Gold, $1.25.

"The Greatest Gift" opens with a ghastly tragedy. A man who has just succeeded to a fortune returns home to find that his wife has become insane, and in a paroxysm of madness has thrown their only child out of the window. He lives, but grows up deformed, both in mind and body, with one dominating passion — love for his cousin Margery. Out of love and gratitude to her uncle, the girl promises to marry her cousin. From this unnatural state of things the author is, of course, bound to rescue his heroine and he does. The enterprising journalist, who has to act as amateur detective, and the wily widow, who will persist in trying to marry him, the coy maiden, and the bold adventuress, all have their parts to play in bringing about the denouement. The author shows ingenuity in handling his plot, and there is enough love, mystery, and tragedy to satisfy the most exacting lover of an exciting tale.—*Washington Post.*

Those estimable persons who object to psychological subtleties and merely literary fripperies are commended to "The Greatest Gift," by A. W. Marchmont. In this volume the characters are up and doing from the initial paragraph. . . . How he does it, we shall leave the reader to find out, with the assurance that the author shows much ingenuity in the handling of his plot, and here is enough love, mystery, and tragedy to satisfy the most exacting lover of an exciting tale.
—*N. Y. Evening Telegram.*

A. W. Marchmont is a clever writer of light, or ephemeral fiction. His touch is delicate, his insight keen and his imagination bright. His skill was never so well displayed as in "A Dash for a Throne," but here we find him congenially employed.—*Detroit Journal.*

"The Greatest Gift," by A. W. Marchmont, is in its theme quite unlike the author's previous novels, but though it has nothing to do with thrones and swords, and its passions and tragedies are those of people who live in ordinary English homes and are unknown to history, they are treated in the same masterful manner as those of the author's characters of higher rank. Undoubtedly, too, they will please quite as large a circle of readers. . . . The novel involves several charming love stories and several others that are not so charming but are certainly entertaining.—*Bookseller and Stationer.*

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F. M. BUCKLES & COMPANY

9-11 East 16th Street, New York

In London's Heart

By GEORGE R. SIMS

435 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25

George R. Sim's name is associated with melodrama, and in his latest novel, "In London's Heart," the melodramatic element is decidedly to the fore, though lovers of exciting fiction — of stories where struggling human nature and bad, bad villains produce hairbreadth scenes — will find it made up of absorbing materials. The hero is Stephen Alison, a ticket-of-leave-man, etc., etc., whose sentence was scarcely the result of his own crime, and who is anxious, like so many of his own class from poor Bob Brierly downwards, to lead a new life. The desire to sever himself from his old associates is not so easy to accomplish, and gradually he falls into bad company again. Having no money, he agrees with some old confederates to accompany a dissipated young nobleman abroad, with the intention of killing him and then claiming the insurance money which the sharpers have already got the victim to assign to them. But before this delightful little scheme can be set actually working, the nobleman is murdered at his house in Grosvenor place, and suspicion falls on Stephen. The rest of the book is a triumphant effort to clear Stephen, and everybody is finally punished or rewarded in due measure.—*Albany Argus.*

"In London's Heart," by George R. Sims, is the story of an English "ticket-of-leave" convict, who was desirous of living a new life, but found it difficult to get away from his old associates. He returns to his old ways, but by an astonishing incident becomes a millionaire. From that time on the story becomes highly sensational, and the reader who wants "thrilling excitement" gets it in liberal measure.—*Cleveland Plaindealer.*

"In London's Heart," by George R. Sims, is another proof of this author's power to write a good melodramatic story. It is full of trouble and struggle, plotting and mystery, critical situations and stirring incidents. Moreover, it is coherent and readable and will prove popular with readers of adventurous fiction.—*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.*

To begin with a gentlemen who is also a ticket-of-leave man and end up with the same gentleman in his brother's place as a millionaire after a series of the most alarming and sensational adventures is George R. Sims' way of telling "In London's Heart." The story is a rattler. It isn't exactly a detective or mystery story; but it is the good old melodrama of an earlier day brought into the present age for its entertainment, if not its edification. There is a detective, of course, but he is friendly to the gentleman-criminal, instead of being a mere sleuth, and the book contains other novel features which are enough to delight a varied and youthful audience.—*Chicago Evening Post.*

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A Ward of the King

(*An Htstorical Romance*)

By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID

328 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1 25

This is a story of the times of the great Constable of Bourbon. Jeanne d'Acigné is married when a child to the Comte de Laval. Adventures and the clash of steel are things masculine, and the woman cannot put enough muscle into her hard knocks. But perhaps for this very reason it may be commended to those gentler souls who shrink from blood and wounds; and it may be also commended to those who are charmed by a singularly refined and feminine style for its own gracious sake.—*London Literary World.*

"A Ward of the King" is a romance of the time of the Bourbon kings. The heroine is the only child of the Count d'Acigné, dead when the story opens; the heroes, the Count of Laval, whom she marries at thirteen at the command of the King and her friend and unknown lover, Roland, the heir of the Vicomte d'Orbec—both noble men in truth. The cousin of the Count of Laval, Etienne de Retz, conceived a passion for the Countess Laval on her wedding day. This leads to the intrigue about which the story, full of life and fire, centers.—*The Outlook.*

Miss Katharine S. Macquoid in her new book, "A Ward of the King," has departed somewhat from the usual rule of romance writers. She has taken for the centre figure of the story a woman instead of a swaggering man. This notion, however, must be commended by the excellent manner in which the authoress has transcribed it.—*Boston Courier.*

With the present widespread popularity of, and interest in the historical romance, Katharine Macquoid's "A Ward of the King" is sure of a hearing. The tale is worthy of the encomiums which are being bestowed upon it. The story is of the Great Constable of Bourbon; its scenes and its times readily lend themselves to the play of the romantic incident and the weaving of skilful plots. The story is marked by a style of singular refinement.—*American*, Nov. 16.

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A Rise in the World

By ADELINE SERGEANT

377 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, ink and gold, $1.25.

Miss Sergeant's new novel has not "Adam Grigson's" right to consideration, though it is not without a certain interest for the reader who has just laid down the latter book. The heroine of "A Rise in the World" is a little household drudge, kind hearted, good and unselfish, but untaught and illiterate as any other London "slavey." We do not say that it would be impossible for this girl to reach a high place in English society within an absurdly short time, but it must be admitted that the transition as described by Miss Sergeant is not convincing. A man's a man for a' that, but training, or the lack of it, and the human being's evironment must count, so that it is not easy to accept as a probable personage the cockney servant who becomes a beautiful peeress and charming woman of the world with such startling rapidity.—*N. Y. Tribune.*

In "A Rise in the World" (Buckles) Adeline Sergeant outdoes Laura Jean Libbey in her efforts to bring her heroine from the lowliest walks of life to the height of the social world. She makes the poor girl, who is a nursery maid, awkward, stupid, stubborn, and untidy, only granting her the graces of a kind heart and a sensible name, Elizabeth. Of course, the hand of every man is against Elizabeth as she struggles to make herself worthy of the position to which marriage with a gentleman has raised her; but in time, by the tender guidance of the rash young man's unworldly mother, the girl becomes a marvel of feminine attractiveness. One by one her enemies are laid low and she forgives them all. The story is not quite so melodramatic as those of its kind usually are. The noteworthy thing about it is the ease with which the author removes immovable obstacles. —*Chicago Tribune*

Readers of this interesting picture of London society will perhaps be impressed by the unevenness of its literary merit. Some of the scenes are capitally done; others seem hurriedly sketched, but the author's style is always femininely incisive. Despite a few seeming improbabilities in plot, the story as a whole is one which has in it an inevitable attractiveness, as do all accounts of real rises and progresses in the world.—*The Outlook.*

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Comrades True

By ANNIE THOMAS

354 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, ink and gold, $1.25.

This novel is nothing if not up to date, and if its publication had only been delayed a month the fall of Tientsin would in all probability have figured largely in the closing pages. The name is all right as far as a certain portion of the characters go, but the rest of them are about as untrue to each other as one could possibly imagine, and the readers will make a great mistake if they imagine those who are engaged to be married in the early part of the book have any real intention of actually marrying. For those who like to have their fiction people live, move, and have their being amid the toil and trouble of everyday life, this story will, without doubt, appeal strongly. The English—well, that does not matter so much in books of this class, and the action is so rapid and vividly realistic that one unconsciously overlooks any little mistakes which the author may have committed in her desire to get the book complete before the war in Africa was finished.—*Phila. Telegraph.*

"Comrades True" is a wide-reaching romance. The list includes impecunious comrades—not well-mated comrades—divorced and wanted-to-be-divorced comrades, and their infelicities are heard all the way from London to South Africa on sea and land. The reader will ever find it difficult without tabbing to keep an account of the divorce mill. The parties in each contest are remarkably serene, and behind each some other man or woman appears in sight to enable "Comrades True" to bear a separation with equanimity. The London Literary World, in noticing the book, says: It cannot be complained that "Comrades True" is not up to date. The Boers, the imperial volunteers, wounds, and nurses play a large part in it, and the author delivers herself of plenty of such correct, if rash Saxon sentiments as 'I'd like to face a hundred Boers single-handed this minute, and how them what an Englishman can do when his blood is up at insults offered to our Queen and country." The story has life and movement, and seems to be in line, and does not comprehend the connubial infelicities which are threatening the happy home life of the world.—*Chicago Inter-Ocean.*

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The Plain Miss Cray

By FLORENCE WARDEN

327 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, ink and gold, $1.25.

A novel without any aim but that of entertaining, which it does to perfection. A match-making mother, a beautiful daughter and a plain one, a poor wooer for the pretty girl who is sent about his business by the worldly mater, to be recalled when her dreams prove unrealizable, and a brilliant match for the plain Miss Cray—this is the slight plot of an unpretentious, readable tale.—*Mail and Express.*

A healthy story of the good, old-fashioned type; interesting without being unhealthily exciting To every cloud there is a silver lining, and catastrophes only threaten, never happen. The characters are normal and their lives natural. A pleasant relief from the intense problem novel.—*Philadelphia Telegraph.*

After a careful study of the history of humor from the time of Noah to the Sunday comic supplements, Mark Twain declared that there were really only thirty-nine genuine original jokes as the sum total of human effort in that direction. A study of the novels of the year justifies the assertion that there are only two kinds of novels—those in which everything ends all right and everybody is happy and those in which everything is all wrong and nobody is happy. Of this latter class of novels we have had a surfeit recently, and can afford to thank Miss Warden for turning back into the paths of optimism, of cheerfulness and peace, as she does in "The Plain Miss Cray."—*New York World.*

"A novel in which poetical justice is fearlessly dealt out," a writer in the London Literary World humorously remarks, "has become almost a thing of the past." For those who have found this a hardship "The Plain Miss Cray," by Florence Warden (F. M. Buckles & Company), will doubtlessly appeal. It is perhaps enough for the intending reader to know that the heroine whose name figures in the title of the book, triumphs over the villain and her prettier rivals with ease. Those who "get enough of life as it is" and want something else in their fiction can obviously take up this volume with confidence.—*N. Y. Evening Telegram.*

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Vanity

THE CONFESSIONS OF A COURT MODISTE

By "RITA"

282 pages, size 7½ x 5, Ink and Gold, $1.25

A court modiste makes confession in this bright book by one who conceals herself as "Rita." We are introduced to the modiste at once and find her on the verge of bankruptcy when an Irishman arrives in London from Paris. The rich American wearing diamonds as big as hickory nuts with her man-hunting daughter are given the benefit of a dressing down. There is a comedy side to the story that has not been neglected.—*Detroit Journal.*

Another of the new society novels is "Vanity," by "Rita," which is a bright and pleasing volume. The story is cleverly told by a court modiste who had abundant opportunities to see behind the curtains of English aristocratic life. She draws a picture of immoralities, jealousies, falseness and bickering. The story is full of such incidents as scenes at the London restaurants, where "emancipated women" sup with kindred souls while their husbands are elsewhere engaged, and doings at country houses where society conventionalities are laid aside, and there is the freedom of "Liberty Hall."—*Buffalo Express.*

"Vanity," by "Rita," affords a glimpse of shoddy fashionable life. The reader gets a peep behind the scenes of fashionable life in "Vanity." The rather pathetic court dresser, through whose eyes we see the fashionable world, is forced by necessity to cater to "smart" people. They so run to credit, however, that the dressmaker would have been ruined were it not for an Irishman of taste and wealth who goes into partnership with her. Pathos and comedy, with a dash of tragedy, are judiciously combined into a breezy story.—*Chicago Times Herald.*

"Vanity," the confessions of a court modiste, by "Rita," deals daringly with the fashionable life of London. The comedy of the story is made all the more enjoyable by occasional episodes of real pathos.—*Albany Argus.*

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The Mysterious Burglar

By GEO. E. WALSH

247 pages, size 7¼ x 4¾. Ink and Gold, $1.25

"The Mysterious Burglar" is a first-rate detective story.
—*Chicago Record-Herald.*

"The Mysterious Burglar" is a very good story. The mystery is cleverly handled to the end and is a thoroughly up-to-date tale.—*Toledo Blade.*

Mr. Walsh is a bright story-teller.
—*New Haven Courier Journal.*

It is a peculiar and and intensely interesting story.
—*Cleveland Recorder.*

It is an exceptionally good story. From the outset it is interesting, and the plot is so well handled that surprises are as constant as in the life of a burglar himself.
—*Philadelphia Telegraph.*

"The Mysterious Burglar," which appears in the list of the best selling books, is said to be founded upon fact. As a study of modern criminology in the guise of fiction, it is certainly worth perusal.—*New York Journal.*

"The Mysterious Burglar," by George E. Walsh, recently published by F. M. Buckles & Co., is now in its third edition. Many letters asking about the possibilities of hypnotism described in the book, and, in particular, if there is any foundation in fact for the story, have been received by the author.— *New York Times.*

A story more singular has seldom been written and the conception is daring in the extreme. The plot is puzzling, and as the various mysteries unravel the reader is shocked and surprised. The iniquity has its daily parallel, however, and taking it as a whole, the author has been successful in producing a really admirable work.
—*Albany Times Union.*

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My Lady's Diamond's

By ADELINE SERGEANT

316 pages, size 7½ x 5, cloth. Ink and Gold, $1.25

"My Lady's Diamonds," by Adeline Sergeant. This story proceeds on somewhat familiar lines, but the incidents are of such a startling, sensational description that they permit the reader little opportunity for critical reflection until the last page is reached. In the first place Lady Rockingham's diamonds are stolen, and suspicion is cast by the old device of a purloined clock on Joan Carrington, the daughter of an old friend who is staying with her. Even Geoffrey Brandon, Joan's lover, believes the unfounded accusation, for did he not one evening see Joan in her familiar dark-blue cloak, with the rose-colored lining, hand over the diamonds to a tall, sinister-looking individual with a long black moustache curled up at the points, amid the ruins of a neighboring castle? With lover-like obtuseness he acquaints Joan with the condemnatory evidence he has in his possession, and naturally she is all aflame at the want of confidence he shows in her. There is also staying with Lady Rockingham a quiet, dove-like creature, Nina Townley, who in a few effective touches contrives to accentuate the situation. The remainder of the narrative is taken up with Geoffrey's efforts to clear up the mystery of the diamonds and discover the real perpetrator of the robbery, for with Joan's indignant denial all his old belief in her goodness, purity, etc., returns. It can hardly be said that he is a heaven-born detective, but by sticking unflinchingly to his task, and showing no little courage and energy, he manages at last to fasten the crime on the right parties, and the curtain falls on general apologies to poor Joan for the pain that has been caused her. The story is a very good specimen of its class, and the incidents, while never completely outraging the limits of probability, are of such a description as thoroughly to absorb the reader's attention.—*Publishers' Circular.*

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The Millionaire Mystery

By FERGUS HUME

287 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25

"The Millionaire Mystery" is another good story by Fergus Hume, author of "The Mystery of a Handsome Cab." Those who have been entertained by Mr. Hume's previous books will find this an equally entertaining story, which will beguile away a leisure hour or two very satisfactorily. The mystery in this story is unraveled without becoming tiresome. It is not an unwieldy or profound mystery which requires deep concentration to apprehend. It is just enough of a mystery to wet the reader's appetite and hold the attention until the story is finished, which is an achievement that many writers of fiction fail to accomplish. Mr. Hume has not entered a new and original field. He depicts his situations with perspicacity and vigor, and with a touch of enthusiasm here and there, and the dramatic situations are worked up most cleverly.—*New Haven Courier Journal.*

Fergus Hume needs no introduction as a writer of stories which are worth reading if one likes mystery, romance and no higher purpose than entertaining by a good story. His "The Mystery of a Handsome Cab" showed his ability to handle and develop a mystery. "The Millionaire Mystery" shows the same quality, and with a number of interesting characters moving in an interesting plot is a decidely readable story.—*Indianopolis Journal.*

This is the day of the detective story. There is never enough good literature of the sort to satisfy the demand. Mr. Fergus Hume, who first won fame by "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," has written others, and his latest is "The Millionaire Mystery," from the press of F. M. Buckles & Co. This is a good story and somewhat out of the ordinary run. The reader is not constantly run up against a stone wall and kept in the dark until the last moment. Rather he is allowed to see the gradual unraveling of the mystery, though there are some surprises in the course of the narrative, which is exceedingly well told.—*The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

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The Conquest of London

By DOROTHEA GERARD

321 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth, Ink, Gold, $1.25

Dorothea Gerard writes stories which are bright and interesting without being particularly strong or aiming at anything beyond pleasant entertainment. "The Conquest of London" is not an historical novel, as the name might imply. It relates the experiences of four nice English girls, sisters, who having been brought up in an out-of-the-way place and inherited a small sum of money, went to London to see something of society. Out of these commonplace materials the author makes quite a readable story.

—*Indianapolis Journal.*

"The Conquest of London," by Dorothea Gerard, relates the adventures of four orphan girls between fifteen and twenty, who live upon the modest income of one hundred and twenty pounds a year in a little cottage at Gilham, miles from a neighboring village. After many severe struggles things shape themselves right in the end and everything has a happy finish. The book is brightly written, a pretty little story which will be certain to find favor with the readers.—*Albany Times Union.*

This is a healthy novel of the entertaining type, a capital story of the adventures of four sisters who are left in a village well nigh penniless. An uncle leaves them a thousand pounds apiece, with which they go to London and see social life—as long as their money lasts. They get through with it speedily and are forced to return to their village home. There they see some bitter days, but all ends happily by the oldest sister's marriage to a rich man of the neighborhood.—*Louisville Courier-Journal.*

Dorothea Gerard is the famous authoress of "A Forgotten Sin," "The Impediment," etc., but in this later work—"The Conquest of London"—she has brought forth a masterpiece which will make this famous English authoress a world-wide reputation as a writer of fiction.

—*Southern Star.*

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Daunay's Tower

By ADELINE SERGEANT

405 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25

In certain passages suggestive of "East Lynne," in others recalling "Jane Eyre," and in plot remindful of Wilkie Collins' ingenious contrivances, "Daunay's Tower" appears as a late exponent of that school of fiction which delighted the novel readers of a quarter of a century ago.—*Chicago Record.*

"Daunay's Tower," by Adeline Sergeant, is a novel of exceptional power and merit. The plot is skilfully woven out of somewhat unpromising material, and the air of improbability which marks the opening chapter soon vanishes and gives place to the natural and easily possible. The leading characters are not only distinct and well drawn, but are more completely drawn than is often the case in the light novel; the literary style is not that of the space writer. The subordinate characters are all natural—not lay figures. —*Philadelphia Telegraph.*

Though based on a rather improbable foundation, Miss Adeline Sergeant's new novel shows no falling off in regard to vigor and imagination and deserves to be welcomed as a more than ordinary piece of fiction. The pathos of the situations is tenderly drawn, and the heroine holds the interest and sympathy of the reader.—*Albany Times Union.*

This is a forceful and interesting novel. It has a combination of incident and movement that gives it an attractiveness that more than compensates for infelicities of expression and a certain clumsiness in the handling of the plot.—*Baltimore Sun.*

Adeline Sergeant gives to us a good, vigorous romance in "Daunay's Tower"—just the sort of book to be a royal companion for a summer afternoon.—*American.*

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A Traitor in London

By FERGUS HUME

355 pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, Ink and Gold, $1.25

Fergus Hume needs no introduction as a writer of stories which are worth reading, especially if you like a mixture of love, danger, and mystery; and the author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab" there showed his ability to handle well the latter element in fiction.

His latest novel is entitled "A Traitor in London," and he has seized upon the recently uppermost theme in the public mind—the Boer war.

The mystery is well handled to the end, the characters are very natural people and politics in England and real campaigning in South Africa are introduced in order. "A Traitor in London" is a clever story, entertaining throughout, and well sustains the author's reputation.—*Boston Times.*

Mr. Hume has within the last five years placed himself in the same class with Dr. Doyle as a writer of detective stories. He has developed the detective instinct and is able to weave about his plot a tangle of intricate and confusing incidents which leave the reader altogether in the dark until the author chooses to turn the limelight upon his own mystery. In the present work Mr. Hume deals with the exciting scenes in London just previous to the outbreak of the Boer war, and despite his intensely pro-British sentiment he has made a book which will interest all lovers of this character of fiction.—*Indianapolis Sentinel.*

Fergus Hume has written a good romance in which the Boer war plays an important part. A Boer spy and his machinations open the story. His cunning and effrontery mark him out as a strong character. He is not so zealous in the pursuit of his country's interests as in the winning of a young lady who loves another.

Murder and mystery puzzle the reader, and there are many surprises.—*Louisville Courier-Journal.*

The mystery of the story is a murder committed in England, and it is a mystery which puzzles the reader to the end, ingeniously leading the reader from one guess to another, and finally affording a real surprise. The novel is one to please all classes of readers.—*Pittsburgh Press.*

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The Luck of a Lowland Laddie

By MAY CROMMELIN

319 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth. Ink and Gold, $1.25

May Crommelin's story of "The Luck of a Lowland Laddie" is a bright, pretty and thoroughly readable love story. The hero owes his luck to the fact of his being the seventh son of a seventh son, and every seven years some stroke of fortune increases his happiness. His life is sketched from the moment of his birth. He is poor, and, of course, has a charming sweetheart—and what would a story like this be if, with the same inevitableness, he did not find a will bequeathing to him vast estates. Then the will is stolen, and Jock goes out to Peru to work for Elsie and incidently to have an exciting time, and some person tells her he is dead. But he comes back, and everything ends very happily.—*San Francisco Bulletin.*

This is another book of superior interest, unpretentious yet charming which merits the reader's attention. It is a very pretty story, the chief charm of which, Jock Ramsay, is a Scottish lad who is moreover a seventh son of a seventh son, of whom the village oracle, an aged sybil, predicts at his birth a checkered and very interesting career. Jock has a life full of adventure in several climes. There is a charming, lovable you lady in the story, who has Jock's love and who loves him, and there is a will bequeathing him a large fortune, which Jock and his sweetheart discover in its mysterious hiding place. Jock has a rascally brother, who, when Jock was supposed to be dead, causes no end of trouble to Jock's sweetheart and plays a desperate game. Jock wins at last. There is a very pretty ending to this delightful little story, and it is a story which one eagerly reads to the finish. Old and half forgotten superstitions of Scotland play a part in the tale.

—*New Haven Courier Journal.*

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A State Secret

By B. M. CROKER

318 pages, size 7½ x 5, Cloth. Ink and Gold, $1.25

Mrs. Croker's signature, either to a long or short story, has come to be generally accepted as security for a pleasant hour. The present series of sketches is no exception. There is little out of the ordinary in the experiences related in this book, if a certain grisly ghost story, which seems to have strayed into more cheerful company, be excepted. But whether the scene is in dingy lodgings in a faded Dublin street, among the Munster peasantry, on a Scotch moor, or away in an up-country Indian station, the people are very real. In the story which gives the title to the volume we meet an eccentric but very philosophical old French woman whose room is filled with lumber of all descriptions. She dislikes exceedingly to have the apartment swept, and declares that she rather likes dust; "I am getting used to it," she calmly announces. "We shall all come to dust ourselves ere long, and what harm is the poor dust doing? We may be dispersing our ancestors!" These sketches are brief, but they leave a defined impression, and one feels that it would be agreeable to prolong some of the acquaintances here made. However, as Mrs. Croker well knows, one of the qualities of a readable short story is that it stimulates rather than satisfies.—*The Washington Post.*

"A State Secret, and Other Stories," by B. M. Croker, is an excellent collection of Irish stories by a known and popular writer. Mrs. Croker has published many novels that have succeeded, and have deserved to succeed, one of those best known being "The Real Lady Hilda," and one of the best, one which has not so many readers, is called "Beyond the Pale." These stories are in the same vein as the books; they are the work of a writer who knows her subject, and has a very neat touch. It is reasonably safe to take up anything she writes with the expectation of being entertained and the certainty that the entertainment will not be of the kind one is more or less ashamed of feeling.

—*Hartford Times.*

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